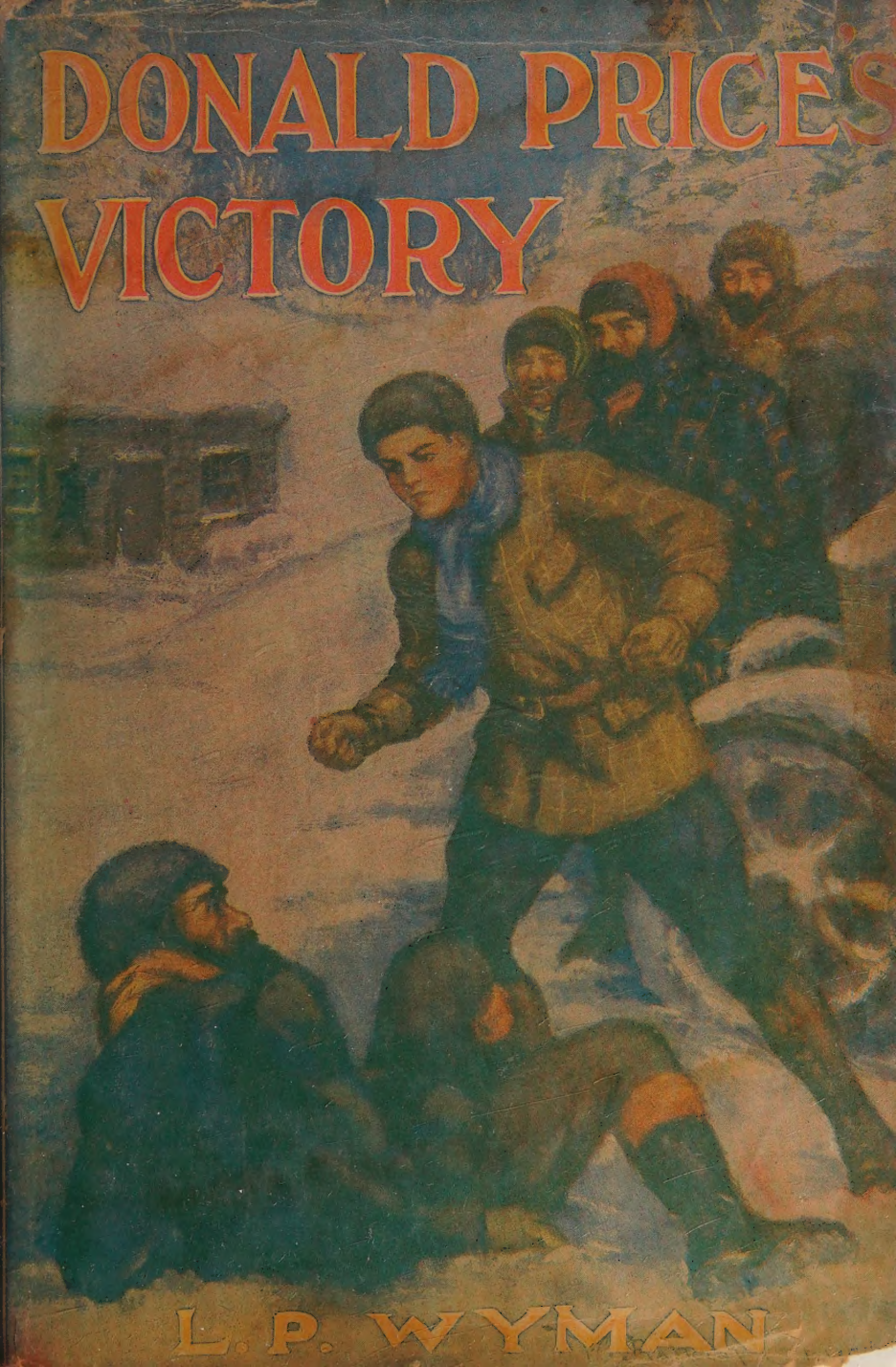
DONALD PRICE'S VICTORY



L. P. WYMAN

DONALD PRICE'S VICTORY

By L. P. Wyman

When Donald Price's father died, all that remained of his once sizable fortune was a tract of woodland on the shores of Moosehead Lake in Maine, and that was mortgaged.

Risking the loss of the entire legacy, Donald decided to lumber the tract and gave a second mortgage to secure money to finance the venture.

With a somewhat dubious crew of woodsmen he began the work, which was made as difficult as possible by enemies who wished to obtain possession of the tract.

Irish Mike, the camp boss, and Tony, the cook, did their best to help Donald, but it was by his own courage and persistence, hard work, and clear thinking, that he accomplished the job he had set himself to do, and did so in a way that won the respect even of his enemies.

The man went down without a sound.

Donald Price's Victory

By L. P. WYMAN

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DONALD PRICE'S VICTORY

CHAPTER I

TURNED DOWN

"I'm mighty sorry, son, but——"

"So they turned me down, did they?"

The president of the First National Bank leaned back in his chair and his long slim fingers toyed absently with a lead pencil as he looked at the boy in the chair at the other side of his desk.

"Yes, they did just that," he said slowly. "Three of us, Blake, Walton and I, voted yes but the others voted no and it was four to three against you."

"Wasn't the security enough?"

"Sure it was. That track of timber's easily worth more than twice what you wanted."

"Then I don't see——"

"But I do," the president interrupted. "Sloyd is one of the directors and the other three are

mixed up with him in one way or another and always vote as he tells them to."

"I—I guess I do see now," the boy said as he leaned forward in his chair. "I forgot, for the moment, that he was a director. Of course he wouldn't vote for me. But can you tell me, Mr. Long, why it is that he hates me? Of course I know that he always was against Father but I never knew why."

For several minutes the man was silent and it was evident to the waiting boy that a struggle was going on in his mind.

"Well," he said finally, "I dunno as I ought to tell you seeing as how your father never did but I'm going to do it all the same. Ben Sloyd has hated your father since the time he married your mother, over twenty years ago. You see," he added as a puzzled expression crossed the boy's face, "he wanted to marry her himself and it's the only thing I ever knew Ben to fail of getting what he wanted."

"You, you mean he wanted to marry my mother?"

"Sure he did, and he took it mighty hard when she picked your father."

"But how could——"

"Oh, Ben wasn't so bad twenty years ago,

that is so far's looks went. He's deteriorated a lot since then," the president interrupted.

"He must have if Mother ever——"

"Oh, I don't think she ever exactly encouraged Ben," he again interrupted. "But you see Ben was always cock sure of himself, and I guess it never did occur to him that a girl could take another fellow so long's he was in the field."

"I see, and it goes without saying that I'm mighty glad he fell down that time."

"Can't say that I blame you for saying that. Ben Sloyd is a hard man and once he gets a grudge against a fellow he never forgets it. But it's pretty small of him to visit the sins of the father onto the second generation," and there was a suspicion of a twinkle in the eyes of the president.

"I'd be mighty glad, Don, to let you have the money myself, but just now it's impossible. All my funds are tied up in United States Steel and Pennsylvania Railroad stocks and bonds and both are way below what I paid for them, so I couldn't sell without losing a lot of money."

"I understand and thank you just the same," the boy said as he got to his feet. "And I also thank you for trying to get it for me through the bank."

"Oh, that's all right. Only wish I could have put it over," and the president held out his hand which the other was quick to grasp.

"There goes a boy I'd be proud to call son," the man said half aloud as the door of the office closed.

As Donald Price emerged from the bank onto Water Street he noticed that a few scattering flakes of snow were drifting lazily downward and the sight made him catch his breath as he stood for a moment looking up at the sky.

"The first snow coming and not a thing done yet," he muttered as he turned on his heel and started for home.

Although optimistic by nature it is probable that the little town of Skowhegan, nestled among the Maine hills on the banks of the Kennebec River, held no heavier heart than that which beat in his breast as he slowly made his way up Baptist Hill.

Although Mr. James Long, the bank president, had called him a boy and although he looked the part, he was in reality nearly twenty-four years old. He would have graduated from college the following spring had not his father died suddenly, just as he was about to return for the fall term. It had always been supposed that Mr. Price was, if not wealthy, at least in

comfortable circumstances. But after the funeral it was found that recent speculations which had turned out badly had embarrassed him to such an extent that even the homestead on the Hill was mortgaged for all it would stand.

"It's too bad," the lawyer had told him, "but there is really nothing left except that wood land up by Moosehead Lake, and there's a mortgage of ten thousand on that."

It was characteristic of Donald Price that all the gloom vanished from his face as he entered his home. Not for worlds would he let his mother suspect that he was worried if he could avoid it.

Mrs. Price, a young appearing woman in the late forties, glanced up as he entered the living room.

"Well, sonny?" she asked.

"Not so well either," he smiled as he crossed the room and stood by her chair laying his hand on her shoulder. "The bank turned me down but that's nothing. All the money in the world isn't in the First National, you know."

"I know," she sighed as she slowly stroked the hand. "But where else can you expect to get it?"

"Now don't you worry, Mumsy dear," and the

boy's hand lovingly stroked the hair that was but slightly tinged with gray. "I'll find a way and soon, too."

Dusk was falling and Donald had just snapped on the light when the door bell rang. As he threw open the front door he was somewhat surprised and not a little taken back to see that it was Ben Sloyd who had called. For an instant neither spoke then, remembering his manners, Donald said:

"Good evening, Mr. Sloyd. Will you come in?"

Ben Sloyd was a heavyset man well past fifty. In his younger days he might have been not unpleasant to look upon but years of hard rough living had coarsened his features to such an extent that his face was little short of repulsive.

"Thanks. Don't care if I do," he growled as Donald held the door open for him to pass. "Evening, Mrs. Price," he said a moment later in a voice which he evidently tried to make sound pleasant.

"Good evening, Mr. Sloyd. Please take a chair." Mrs. Price endeavored to inject a note of welcome in the invitation which, to tell the truth, she was far from feeling.

Ben Sloyd slowly eased his great bulk into an

easy chair and for a moment cast his gaze about the room.

"Right cozy place you got here," he said.

"We find it very comfortable," Mrs. Price replied.

"Hump. I s'pose so. Goin' to keep on livin' here?"

"Why, I suppose so." Mrs. Price was so surprised at the question that she was somewhat at a loss for an answer.

"Well, I s'pose you're trying to guess why I'm makin' this call, so I'll come to the pint right off. Do you want to sell that strip of land up at the lake?"

"No, we do not," Donald broke in.

Ben Sloyd turned his gaze slowly toward the speaker. "I was askin' your mother," he snapped. "I believe the land belongs to her."

"You're right there," Donald replied, "but she doesn't want to sell it."

Sloyd looked to Mrs. Price.

"Don is right," she smiled. "The land is not for sale."

"It ought to be," Sloyd grunted. "I happen to know something about how you're fixed financially and you ought to get rid o' that land. It hain't bringin' in nothin'." Then as neither Donald nor his mother spoke, he went on: "Tell

ye what I'll do. I know there's a mortgage of ten thousand dollars on it. Now I'll give ye five thousand over and above the mortgage. I know it's more'n it's worth, but I'd like to help you."

Donald could hardly repress a smile as he glanced at his mother.

"Thanks for the offer, Mr. Sloyd," he said, "but, as Mother said, the land is not for sale."

Sloyd frowned. "I heard her say that but didn't ye hear me say as how ye ought to sell it?"

"But it's her land, Mr. Sloyd."

"Don't I know it? But what does she know about business? I tell her she ought to sell it," and he leaned back as though that must of necessity close the argument.

"While we appreciate your advice, Mr. Sloyd, I must still insist that the land is not for sale," Donald said a note of finality in his voice.

"I'll pay ye seven thousand," the man snapped.

"No."

"All right then, have it your own way, but I'm warnin' ye that ye'll be sorry."

"I hope not," Donald said pleasantly.

"Thinkin' of cuttin' on it this winter?"

"I've been thinking of it, yes."

"Where ye goin' to get the money for an outfit?"

"That's a question which I haven't as yet answered even to myself."

"Nor you won't."

"You may be right," Donald replied with a smile, "but I can try you know."

"All right. But remember this, my offer don't hold after to-night. Take it or leave it, it's all the same to me only, as I said afore, I wanted to help ye," Sloyd said as he rose from his chair.

"You may rest assured that we will not try to hold you to it," Donald told him as he moved toward the door.

"The old rascal," he declared a moment later after he had closed the door behind the guest. "He knows that that land is worth all of thirty thousand dollars if it's worth a cent."

"Your father always said it was worth that much," his mother said as she moved toward the kitchen. "I'll have supper on the table in a few minutes, sonny."

"I'm going down to Waterville in the morning and have a talk with the Northern Star people," he told his mother an hour later after they had finished supper. "I know they want a lot

of lumber for next spring and I may be able to put through some kind of a deal with them."

"I think that would be a good plan," his mother assured him. "But you haven't yet told me why the bank turned you down."

"I guess you know pretty well without my telling you. Ben Sloyd is one of the directors. 'Nuff said."

"I thought as much," Mrs. Price smiled sadly.

"By the way, Mumsy, Mr. Long told me a funny thing. He said that before you married Father, Ben was a suitor for your hand. How about it?"

Mrs. Price blushed. "Why I, I——" she began but Donald interrupted.

"Oh, it's nothing to be ashamed of you know. A cat may look at a queen," he laughed. "But I congratulate you on your judgment."

It was shortly after nine o'clock the following morning when Donald Price entered the office of James Duke. The big man was dictating a letter and did not so much as glance up as the door opened. Donald stood holding his hat rather awkwardly until he had finished his letter and dismissed the girl.

"Well, young man?" The big man turned in his chair and looked him over from head to foot.

"My name is Price, Donald Price."

"Any relation to Bill Price?"

"He was my father."

"Hum. Good man, Bill Price. Knew him pretty well."

"Thanks," Donald said.

"Yes, Bill Price and I had more'n one set to and I didn't always come out first best," and the big man chuckled. "But take a chair and tell me what I can do for you."

"As you of course know," Donald began after accepting the invitation, "Father died last summer."

"And old Maine lost a good man." There was a note of sincerity in the man's voice as he made the statement that warmed Donald's heart toward him.

"He left us a tract of about three hundred acres up on the shore of Moosehead, and——"

"Yes. I know that piece of timber mighty well. Tried to buy it several times," Duke interrupted. "But he wouldn't sell. That all he left?"

"That's all. You see Father lost heavily shortly before he died and it took everything else to square things up."

"Hum. And now I suppose you want to sell that piece of timber."

"No, sir, I do not."

"Don't, eh?"

"No, sir, not if I can help it."

"What then."

"I want to lumber it this winter and I want you to finance me."

For several minutes the big man made no reply and Donald was beginning to feel a bit uneasy.

"How much?" he asked suddenly.

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

"Hum. That's a lot of money."

"But the land is worth fully twice that and there is but ten thousand mortgage against it, so your fifteen thousand would be fully protected."

"Hum. I'll think it over and let you know tomorrow. Suppose you'd want to have us take your logs, eh?"

"Why, yes, certainly. That is, if you want them."

"Usually take all we can get and then don't have enough," the big man said as he turned to his desk indicating that the interview was at an end.

Donald returned to Skowhegan on the noon train. He was very much elated as he was con-

vinced that Duke intended to advance him the money.

"It probably was against his principles to say so right off the bat," he told his mother, as they were eating dinner, "but I'm pretty sure he intended all the time to let me have it."

"Don't get your hopes too high," his mother warned. "I hate to have you disappointed."

But her fears proved groundless for, shortly after nine o'clock the next morning Duke called Donald on the 'phone to tell him that he had decided to take a chance on him.

"I'll have the papers for a second mortgage drawn up and you can come down this afternoon and sign it and get the money," he said.

"I'll be down, and thank you," Donald assured him.

"No thanks necessary," Duke snapped back. "This is a business deal and I expect to make money out of it."

At ten minutes to two o'clock that afternoon he was again in the office of the Northern Star Company. The big man had the papers ready for him to sign.

Donald read it carefully without protest until he came to the last paragraph. As he read this his face clouded.

"Do you think that last condition is fair to me?" he asked looking up from the paper.

"Have to do it on all our contracts or we'd never know where we're at. You see we have to make all our plans months ahead, and if we don't get logs when we expect them it means a loss to us."

"But this says that if I do not have three million feet here by July first I forfeit a thousand dollars a day until they are all here."

"Which is just about what it would cost us to be hung up for logs. It's the usual thing. Take it or leave it. It's up to you."

"All right. I'll take it," Donald said after a moment's thought and, picking up a pen, he signed his name to the paper.

CHAPTER II

THE CREW

The days following were busy ones for Donald. He knew that snow might come to stay at any time and every day was precious. Fortunately he had one man whom he could trust to help him. Mike Dugan, a thickset, red-headed Irishman who had worked for his father many years and as a lumber boss was without a peer in Northern Maine. Mike was at the station to meet him.

"Ye got it?" he asked as he grasped the boy's hand.

"Yes," Donald replied. "I got it all right."

"Thot's foin. It's meself thot's got a half dozen huskies all ready ter start and we'll be off come the mornin' and git the camp up. Yees kin git the rest together in a few days an' come up later."

They were walking up the street toward Donald's home while they talked. At first he intended to tell Mike about the disturbing clause but so eager was the man that he could not

bring himself to dampen his enthusiasm so he decided to let the matter rest until a later date.

"I wouldn't have dared tackle it if it wasn't for you, Mike."

"Whist now, none o' yer blarney. I've allays said as how I'd rather work fer yer dad nor any man livin' an' I guess his son'll do 'bout as well."

"He'll try to, Mike. Do you know where I can get some horses?"

"Sure, an' it's meself as has an option on three of the finest span in the state. But they'll cost yer six hundred a pair."

"All right. Meet me at the bank right after dinner and I'll give you a check and you can close the deal. No use of me going to see them. You know more about a horse than I do ten times over."

The buying of equipment and stores was a comparatively simple matter for Donald had enough experience to know just what was needed, but when it came to hiring men he found that it was a different matter. All the half breeds and Canucks in town were already hired for the winter and he was forced to visit Bangor. Here he found the labor situation not much better. Men were scarce and work plenty. But for three days he hung around the three

employment agencies which the city possessed and at the end of that time succeeded in hiring twenty hands. Many of them were far from the kind he would have chosen had a choice been given him, but it was a case of take what he could get or go without.

He gave each man a ticket and told him to be in Greenville by noon of the next Monday. This is the usual procedure, and it is rarely that a man so hired fails to show up at the appointed place. If he goes back on his bargain he is by common consent blacklisted by all the lumbermen.

Donald arrived home by the night train on Friday only half satisfied with the result of his trip, but feeling that he had done the best he could. Ben Sloyd was at the station when the train pulled in and, as soon as he saw Donald, he stepped up to him.

"How'd you make out, sonny?" he grinned.

"So so," Donald replied turning to push his way through the crowd.

"Hold on a minute," Sloyd grasped him by the arm and Donald stopped. "I want a word with ye. Come this way."

Not wishing to be rude to the man, Donald followed him until they were by themselves at the farther end of the platform.

"I jest wanted to tell ye that ye've made a big mistake in not takin' my offer fer that land. Ye won't be able ter git them logs down the river on time and ye'll lose the thing. Now it ain't too late yit if ye've got any sense. I'll take the contract off yer hands and give ye ten thousand dollars fer the strip. I reckon as how that's mighty generous."

"Perhaps so," Donald replied. "But as I told you before, Mr. Sloyd, the land is not for sale."

"That's final, is it?"

"Absolutely."

"All right," Sloyd snarled. "But don't say I didn't warn ye."

"I won't," Donald promised pleasantly, as he turned and started for home.

"I wonder if he will try to break me," he thought as he walked rapidly along Water Street. "I guess he's mean enough to do it if he could but I hardly see how he can. But if he tries I'll show him that I know how to fight."

His mother was watching at the window as he turned into the yard and her cheery smile as she kissed him did much to lift the load, for the time, from his mind.

"How did you make out, sonny?" she asked as soon as he had removed his overcoat.

"Oh, I got 'em all right, but it was pretty hard sledding. They're about as plentiful as hen's teeth," he laughed as he sat down by the open fire.

"That takes a load off my mind. I was terribly worried for fear you might not be able to get a crew. But come, supper is all ready."

Donald was thankful that she asked no questions regarding the personnel of his crew. He dreaded telling her about it, knowing that it would worry her, and had made up his mind to say nothing unless she pressed him.

Donald took the five o'clock train Monday morning and arrived at Greenville shortly after eight. It had started to snow before he left, and by the time he got to the lake nearly six inches had fallen.

"Hope it keeps up all day," he thought as he crossed the street. "It's packing well and, if it don't let up, there'll be good sledding by night."

"Hello, Don. How's tricks?"

Donald was about to enter the post office to see if there was any word for him from Mike Dugan when the cheery voice hailed him.

"Pretty fine. How's yourself, Joe?" he replied holding out his hand.

"Can't complain," replied Joe Betts, driver

for the Northern Star Company, and a friend of long standing to Donald as he had been to his father before him.

"Hear you're going into business on your own," Betts continued.

"I'm going to have a try at it."

"Up on your strip?"

"Sure."

"What kind of a crew you got?"

"Not so good, I'm afraid. But it was the best I could do this late."

"Well, you got one thing in your favor. Mike Dugan can handle most any kind of a man the Lord ever made. So if they aren't too bad I guess you'll make out all right so far's that goes."

"What time you going up?" Donald asked after they had talked a few minutes longer.

"Right after dinner. Want me to take your gang up, I suppose."

"You suppose right. How about it?"

"Guess I can manage it all right. How many'll there be?"

"Twenty-one, including myself, if they all show up."

"All right, be at the hotel 'bout half-past one."

The Bangor train was due at eleven o'clock,

but owing to the storm, which was showing no signs of abating, it was a quarter to twelve when it pulled in. Donald was on the platform to meet his crew.

"We all here, boss, right side up wid care." A big Canuck, standing well over six feet and who seemed to be the self-appointed leader of the crew, lurched slightly, as he stepped up to Donald.

"That's good. What's your name?" Donald asked.

"Me Jacques Bolduc. Big man. Lick my weight in wild cats," he boasted while the others, crowding around, laughed boisterously.

"All right, Jacques, maybe you'll find some cats up in the woods to lick, but as there doesn't seem to be any around here just at present, we'll go over to the grub house and eat. The truck starts at half-past one."

"You mean mak' fun me 'bout dem cats, oui?"

Donald knew from the man's attitude that he was spoiling for a fight and he was equally well aware that if he showed the least fear his hold on the men would be lost even though he was their boss. So he took a step forward.

"No, I'm not making fun of you," he said sternly looking the man square in the eye.

"I tink mebby you lie, oui," the man leered

and at the same instant aimed a blow for Donald's head.

The boy dodged the blow easily enough and as the force of the effort carried the Canuck slightly off his balance, his right fist shot out and landed square on his jaw. The man went down without a sound. Donald was an expert with his fists, having been rated as the best boxer in college and all the weight of his one hundred and eighty pounds was behind the blow.

For an instant he stood wondering if any of the others would take up the fight. But evidently the bully was not popular with the men for, beyond an angry glance on the faces of a few, they made no move toward avenging their fallen leader.

"He'll be all right in a minute," he told them. "Get him over to the hash house as soon as you can and mind none of you are late or he'll lose his job," and, turning on his heel, he pushed his way through the crowd and crossed the street toward the hotel, where he had already ordered dinner for the crew. He fully realized that, although he had undoubtedly gained the respect if not the admiration of the men, he had made an enemy. Whether Jacques would go on or throw up his job he did not know. He rather

hoped that he would take the latter course, although he hated to lose the man as he looked like a good lumberman.

"One thing's certain, I'll have to keep an eye on him if he goes along. They don't very quickly forget a thing of that sort and, unless I miss my guess, it'll be a long time before he hears the last of it from the crew," he told himself as he entered the hotel.

It was about a half hour later when the crew came in, still laughing and noisy. Jacques was with them and the look on his face boded no good for the young boss.

"Heem some kid dat feller," a small black-haired man sitting near the center of the table, whispered to his neighbor on his right. "Heem got heap big punch."

"Bet' not let Jacques hear you say that," the man whispered back.

"Heem one beeg bully, oui," the little man insisted. "Me no 'fraid of heem."

"Heem bully all right, oui. But Jacques heem mighty strong. Heem mebby geet boss nex' time."

"Not when boss heem look. Mebby geet heem when he no look, eh?"

"Mebby, but Jacques geet heem some time, I bet."

It was snowing harder than ever when Donald came out on the porch having finished his dinner, and nearly a foot had fallen. Joe Betts drove his big truck up a moment later and sprang from the seat to the ground.

"Some snow, Joe," Donald greeted him. "Think she'll pull through?"

"Through a little flurry like this? Guess you don't know that old buss. She'll pull through anything jest so she can get a grip," Joe returned. "But what's this I hear about you knocking Jacques Bolduc down?"

"I guess it was pure luck," Donald smiled. "He ran into my fist and I think perhaps he may have slipped."

"Well, it was a good job from all I hear," Joe grinned lowering his voice as he stepped close to Donald. "But let me tell you, you want to keep a sharp eye on the feller. I know him and he's a bad one. Killed a man last winter. Of course it was an accident, such things always are, but I'm not the only one who had a different guess."

"Thanks for the warning. I'll look out for him, but I fancy his bark is worse than his bite," Donald smiled.

"Well, it's half-past one. Time we were startin'," Joe declared pulling an immense sil-

ver watch from his pocket and glancing at it. "You get on the driver's seat and I'll call 'em."

Donald climbed up and a moment later he heard Joe's voice in the dining room.

"All aboard for the big woods. Step lively now me hearties. We got a hard pull and it's time we were off."

The men followed him out laughing and joking each carrying his bundle containing his few personal effects. They piled into the truck pushing and shoving each other amid shouts of laughter. The bottom of the truck was covered with straw, making it not uncomfortable, although a bit crowded.

"All in?" Joe shouted looking back as he pressed his foot on the starter.

"Oui, all in. Let her go," a half dozen shouted back and the big truck moved slowly away from the hotel.

Almost at once one of the men struck up a song in French in which most of the others joined singing at the top of their voices.

"Good thing you haven't got any horses to scare," Donald shouted in Joe's ear.

"It's sure enough to scare anything that's scarable," Joe flung back as he shifted into second at the foot of a big hill leading out of the town.

The truck made heavy going on the steep hill and at times it seemed about to stall, but all four wheels were equipped with heavy chains which bit through the snow and secured leverage on the hard road beneath. Finally they reached the top and Joe threw her into high.

"Finest view from here in the world," he declared pointing up the lake. "Course you can't see much now with the snow flying, but on a clear day you can see more'n twenty miles up the lake."

"I know," Donald said as he turned up his coat collar. "I've seen it several times and it sure is a peach. I doubt if it can be beat, at least in this country."

It was about twenty miles from Greenville to Donald's tract, and ordinarily the trip would not have taken much over an hour and a half. But, through the snow, speed was impossible, and as the afternoon wore away Donald began to wonder if they would get to the camp before dark. The site of the camp was nearly a mile from the road straight through the thick woods and he did not fancy taking that walk in the dark with an enemy in the crew. He felt quite sure that, with possibly one or two exceptions, none of the men bore him any ill will because of the trouble with their leader, but he was by

no means certain to what extent they would side with him in case of further hostilities.

The truck boasted a speedometer and Donald noted that it was nearly three o'clock when they had covered ten miles. At that rate it would be about half-past four by the time they reached the point where they would have to leave the truck and take to the woods. And he knew that it would be dark very soon after. The fact that the snow seemed to be coming down faster than ever added to his anxiety.

"Can't you get a little more speed out of her," he asked in a low tone. "I'd like to get into camp before dark if possible."

"She's doing about her best now and it's getting worse every minute," Joe replied as he pressed harder on the gas. "What I'm afraid of is that steep hill about a mile ahead of here. If she gets up that we're all right, but I dunno."

The singing had stopped long ago and most of the men, stretched out at full length in the straw, were asleep. The truck was equipped with a top and side curtains so that the snow did not bother them. As there had, up to this point, been little or no wind, they had encountered no drifts. But as they reached the foot of the hill which Joe had mentioned, Donald

noticed that the flakes instead of floating lazily to the earth were now coming in a slanting direction. The flapping of the curtains also bore testimony to the fact that the wind was blowing with considerable violence.

"If it begins ter drift, good night," Joe shouted as he shifted into low.

The heavy truck struck the bottom of the hill at a fair pace but, as it went up, the speed began to lessen very perceptibly and about half way to the top it stalled.

"Now we're in for it. I feared it," Joe declared as he set the brake and reached under the seat for the shovel he always carried in the winter time. "Oh, we'll get up all right, only it'll take time," he added as he sprang to the ground.

"Got another shovel?" Donald shouted.

"Believe there is another one under the seat. Jest feel round."

Donald had no trouble in finding the second shovel and in another minute he had joined Joe and the two were making the snow fly. They cleared two narrow paths for a distance of about thirty feet in front of the wheels and also dug out the snow from in front of the hind wheels.

"Now we'll make another stab at it," Joe

shouted to make his voice heard above the roar of the wind which was now blowing a half gale. "She'll probably stick again but we'll make some headway before she does. Lucky this hill's short even if 'tis steep."

As soon as they were on the seat Joe pressed the starter and, releasing the brake, threw in the clutch. For an instant the rear wheels spun around, then the chains took hold and the truck lurched forward. Joe kept the wheels in the paths, but as soon as they struck the deep snow again their speed began to slacken.

"I'm givin' her all she's got," Joe shouted.

"Good boy! We're gaining on it," Donald shouted back.

But his joy was short lived, for about a hundred feet from where the paths had ended the truck stopped again.

"Nothin' ter do but work," Joe laughed as he jumped down again closely followed by Donald.

"She's drifting pretty fast now," the latter said as he began to dig.

"Right you are, and I'm a thinkin' it'll be a whole lot worse afore it gets better."

"Our cargo seems dead to the world," Donald said as they were about to climb to the seat once more.

"And I reckon it's jest as well. They might

get ugly if they were awake. I hope they sleep till we get there if we ever do."

Four times more they had to stop and shovel before they finally got to the top of the hill. It was nearly half-past four o'clock and already night was beginning to steal over the dense forest. They had passed but one house, the hotel at Lilly Bay, since leaving Greenville, and that house was now several miles behind them. Donald knew that there was no other place where they could stop for nearly ten miles the other side of where they would leave the truck. So it was either make camp that night or wait in the truck for morning.

For some distance now the way led down hill but even so four miles an hour was the best they could do.

"If we strike any big drifts I reckon we'll have to hang up," Joe declared as they reached the foot of the hill. "Thank goodness, there's no more big hills to go up."

For another hour the big truck ploughed its way through the rapidly deepening snow. Three times it stalled in drifts but, as they were not large, the two, with the shovels, made short work of digging their way through. It was not very dark and, even with the aid of the power-

ful lamps, Joe was having considerable difficulty to keep in the road.

Then, just as they turned a sharp curve, the truck stalled once more. At the same time a voice from behind shouted:

"What matter you so late?"

"Stick your head out and you'll soon see," Joe called back as he grabbed his shovel and jumped to the ground.

"I dunno's it's worth while to dig any more," he declared as Donald joined him.

"What then?"

"Reckon we won't starve nor freeze if we stay in the truck all night. Honest Injun, I don't believe we're goin' ter get much farther to-night. Jest hear that wind and look at the snow piling down or up or every which way."

"It's a blizzard all right," Donald acknowledged as he turned his face to avoid the particles of fine snow which, driven by the high wind, stung like so many needles.

"What do you——" he started to ask a question but before he could finish a number of the crew joined them.

"You stuck, oui?" It was big Jacques Bolduc who asked the question.

"Looks like it," Joe replied.

"What we do, eh?"

"Looks like a case of stick to the ship till mornin'," Joe replied throwing his shovel back into the truck.

"You got grub?" one of the other men asked.

"Grub? Of course not. Think this's a traveling feed house?" Joe snapped.

"We no stay here all night no supper," Jacques growled.

"Suit yourself 'bout that," Joe laughed. "The road's in front o' ye an' behind, too, fer that matter. I 'ain't a keepin' ye."

CHAPTER III

SNOWBOUND

"What matter, Jacques?"

By this time all the rest of the crew had piled out and were gathered about the front of the truck where the headlights contended feebly with the thickly flying snow. It was one of the Canucks by the name of Pierre Lareau who asked the question.

"Heem say we stuck," Jacques replied nodding his head toward Joe who was climbing back to his seat.

"You try, see eef heem go, oui," Pierre shouted stepping close to the side of the truck.

"There's no sense in wasting gas," Joe called back. "She won't budge or I wouldn't be waitin' here."

It was evident to Donald, who had already resumed his place beside Joe, that the men were in an ugly mood. He thought it likely that, in spite of his watchfulness, they had brought some of the cheap whiskey with them and had been drinking.

"You try one time more," Pierre insisted, an ugly sneer on his dark face.

"All right. I don't mind tryin' if it'll do ye any good," Joe shouted as he pressed the starter.

The big wheels spun around and the chains bit through to the hard road but the truck did not move. The snow was piled too deep in front of the wheels.

"Now I hope as how ye're satisfied," he cried as he shut off the ignition. "Course 'f you want to take the shovels an' get ter work we may get a few feet further on."

But it was soon evident that the idea of shoveling snow in the blizzard had little attraction for the men for, after a brief conference together, they climbed back into the truck.

"How far we from camp?" Jacques asked leaning over the back of the seat between Donald and Joe.

"I dunno. Why?" Joe asked.

"Mebby we go foot; reach camp; get supper."

"You wait a minute and I'll take a look around," Joe said as he jumped out into the storm again.

Shielding his eyes as well as he was able he tried to pierce the darkness to the right of the

road. Suddenly he recognized a landmark in a blasted pine close to the side of the road.

"Jimminy crickets!" he cried as he climbed again to the seat. "We're only about a hundred feet from where you turn in. Now what do you know 'bout that?"

"Come on, we go geet beeg supper," shouted one of the men from behind.

"Hold yer horses a minute," Joe cautioned in a loud voice. "It's a good mile from the road in to the camp and there's no path. It'll be a prutty risky thing ter try in this storm. Now none 'o ye's goin' to starve afore mornin' an' it's my advice ter ye ter wait right here till daylight."

But his words brought an angry growl of disapproval from several of the crew.

"We go. You show us way," Pierre insisted.

"Yes I will, not," Joe shook his head decisively. "We're goin' ter stay put here till daylight. You fellers do as you like."

"But we no know way."

"That's your hard luck, that is, if you start out."

"You no go, we mak' you go." The man's voice was now threatening.

Joe was about to reply in angry tones when Donald placed his hand on his arm.

"Better go easy, Joe. There's twenty of them and only two of us," he whispered.

"I don't care if there's a hundred, I—I guess you're right though," he suddenly changed his tone as his better judgment asserted itself.

Donald was not a coward but he had good sound common sense and he realized that if it came to a fight, they would be entirely at the mercy of a desperate gang of hungry men. He knew the kind of men they were up against. Uneducated and possessed of but little reasoning power many of them were but little above the scale of beasts when it came to curbing their feelings. One of them in particular, he knew, would only too eagerly welcome a chance to do him an injury. So it was that he was much relieved when Joe so quickly changed his mind.

"All right, boys, if you want to make a try for it I'll do my best to guide ye, but it's goin' ter be no easy trip I'm a tellin' ye."

"Dat all right. We no 'fraid," called out one of the men from the back of the truck.

"We'll have to get the truck out to one side first," Joe declared as he jumped to the ground shovel in hand.

Donald quickly followed him and in a few minutes they had cleared the snow away sufficiently to allow the big truck to be moved to

the side of the road. None of the crew had offered to help, indeed they did not get out of the truck until Joe called to them to come on.

"The lazy lunks," he grunted as he fastened a loose curtain.

"Now you geet lost it be ver' bad ting for you," Jacques threatened as he came close to Joe.

"You bet it will in this storm and fer all the rest of us," Joe snapped, purposely misconstruing the man's meaning.

There was nearly a foot and a half of snow on the level but where they stood it was nearly hip deep. But Joe knew that in the thick woods it would not be so bad.

"Keep close behind me, boy," he said as he started.

Foot by foot they struggled on, Joe stopping every few minutes as if to listen, then plunging ahead as if sure of his way. They had been going on in this way for about a half hour when Jacques shouted for him to stop. Joe waited for the breed to come up.

"You geet lost, eh?" he sneered.

"Not so you'd notice it," Joe snapped. "What's the matter of ye. I told ye it'd be a hard trip didn't I?"

"How far camp?"

"I don't know."

"You no geet lost, you sure?"

"Say, you, if you want to lead this expedition jest say so an' I'll take a back seat. If you don't, shut up and get back," Joe shouted, his patience nearly exhausted.

For a moment the breed made no reply then, grunting something which sounded like a threat, he slunk back.

"I'd like to lose the whole caboodle, but 'twould be murder in this storm," Joe said as he once more took up the trail.

"But are you sure you're going right?" Donald ventured. "It seems to me that we ought to be getting there before long."

"Wall, it's pretty hard to be sure in this darkness, fer a fact, but I gess we'll fetch up somewhere afore long."

As he spoke Joe stopped and drew the heavy mitten from his right hand. Then placing his fingers to his mouth he sent out a shrill whistle which, in spite of the howling of the wind, must have carried for some little distance. But no answering call reached their ears.

"Must be quite a ways yet," Joe said as he again sent the call ringing through the forest.

He repeated the whistle over and over again but to no purpose and finally gave it up for

the time. From time to time Donald could hear the grumbling of the men as they followed in single file.

"They're getting madder all the time, and if we don't strike the camp pretty soon I'm afraid there'll be trouble," Donald thought.

After nearly another half hour had passed Joe again stopped and whistled and, after repeating it three times, the boy's heart leaped as the sound of a horn rang through the forest.

"You got 'em that time, Joe," he shouted.

"Sure I got 'em," Joe shouted back. "We'll be there in a minute now," he added as he started off again.

Soon a dim light flickered through the storm and, throwing the light of the torch ahead of him, Joe made out the form of a man coming toward them.

"Ship ahoy, there, Mike," he shouted.

"Holy mackerel, is thot ye, Joe?"

"Me an' ther rest o' the gang. Supper ready?" Joe asked as he grasped Mike's big hand.

"Sure an' it's bin a-waitin' this two hours, but I'd about given ye up so I had," Mike declared as he reached for Donald and gave him a good old-fashioned hug.

"Lead us to it then," Donald laughed.

Soon the lights from a long low log building shed its welcome beam through the trees and in another minute the tired men were stamping the snow from their feet and legs in the huge room which was to serve as sleeping quarters and dining-room.

One end of the room was lined on both sides with a double tier of bunks which were filled with straw while, at the other end, a roughly built table capable of seating thirty men, reached nearly to the big stove which occupied the center of the room.

"Well, it's plain that you haven't lost any time, Mike," Donald declared as he cast an eye of approval about the room.

"Oh, we bin busy, all right," the Irishman assured him. "It's all ready to begin business we are."

CHAPTER IV

KING SPRUCE

The storm blew itself out during the night and the morning dawned clear and cold. A deathlike stillness pervaded the scene as Donald, the first one up, except the cook and his helper, stepped out into the snow and looked about him. About thirty feet in front of the bunk house was a small building, also of unpeeled logs which he knew was the office. Off to the right, scarcely visible through the trees, was a low shed-like building which he judged was the stable for the horses. The wind had died out entirely and not a branch moved as he stood knee deep in the snow and drew in huge gulps of the spruce laden air.

"It's great," he whispered to himself. "It seems as though I could feel that air clear to my toes. I'll bet this would cure a consumptive in next to no time."

He waded to the office and tried the door. It was not fastened and, pushing it open, he stepped inside. There were two small rooms

separated by a partition of unplaned boards which extended up only about six feet from the floor. The room in which he stood was furnished only with an old flat topped desk, three or four straight backed chairs and a wood burning stove of the air-tight variety. The other room, at the back of the structure, was, he soon found, to serve as the tool house. Cross cut saws, axes, cant-dogs and coils of rope nearly filled the small space.

I'll say Mike's a hustler," he declared as he stepped back into the first room. "How he ever got so much done in so short a time is a mystery to me."

Just then the door opened and Mike came in.

"The top o' the mornin' to yees," he greeted the boy. "Faith an' it's the airly bird ye are."

Donald laughed as he patted the Irishman on the back.

"Mike, you're a wonder," he declared. "It seems to me that you've done a winter's work up here already and you've only been here about a week."

Mike's weatherbeaten face flushed with pleasure.

"Sure, an' it's nothin'," he insisted. "I got a bully bunch o' byes with me. Thot tells the story, I reckon."

"Well, I only hope the bunch I brought up are half as good."

"Ye niver kin tell till ye try 'em. But what's this I hear about ye knockin' the stuffin' out o' thot breed, Jacques Bolduc?"

"Who's been telling you fairy stories?" Donald laughed.

"Faith an' it's no fairy tale the way Joe told it ter me." Mike shook his head. "It's yerself as wants ter look out fer thot guy. It's a bad one he is or it's meself as don't know one whin I sees him."

"Oh, I guess he's not so dangerous," Donald began, but before he had time to say more the breakfast horn made him jump for the door. "Come on, Mike," he shouted back, "I'm hungry enough to eat all the cook has got myself."

"It's meself as thinks as how ye'd blow up an' bust afore ye got half of thot job done," Mike panted following Donald through the snow.

They found the men already seated at the table on which the cook was placing plates heaped with richly browned buckwheat cakes. That the men were well pleased with the food thus far was evident from their talk as plateful after plateful of the cakes disappeared.

"Bless me if dis 'ain't real maple syrup,"

Donald heard the little Frenchman whisper to the man sitting next to him.

When breakfast was nearly over, Donald got to his feet and stepped to the head of the table.

"Before we start in on the job, men, there's a thing or two I want to say to you." He began holding up his hand for silence. "In the first place, I judge that you like the food so far."

Grunts of assent ran around the table.

"I promise that the food will continue as good so long as you work well. Now, I've contracted to deliver a certain amount of lumber at Waterville by a certain date. If I fail to keep that contract I'll be broke, but if all goes well, I'll make some money and there'll be a bonus of not less than fifty dollars for each man. I've agreed to pay you top-notch wages, as you know, and I have a right to expect good hard work and that's what I've got to get to make good."

While he was talking Donald could tell that the greater part of the men were friendly to him, but there were two or three regarding whom he was not so sure. The breed, Jacques Bolduc, sat with a half sneer on his face and, although he was not sure, the boy thought he saw him wink at big Pierre Lareau. That couple would stand a lot of watching in more ways

than one, he told himself as he again waded through the snow to the office.

"Where are we going to begin to cut?" he asked Mike, who was building a fire in the office stove.

"Right down in front close ter the lake. Thin we kin build the tote road as we work back."

By the time the fire was burning the men had gathered in front of the office ready for the day's work. Mike and Donald at once began handing out the huge saws and axes.

"Now thin, me hearties," Mike shouted as the task was finished. "Yees follow me an' I'll be atter tellin' ye whar ter begin."

He quickly led the way down the bank to the shore of the lake not more than a hundred feet distant and the crew followed in his footsteps, Donald bringing up the rear.

The tall spruces grew nearly to the water's edge and the boy's heart swelled with pride as he looked at the huge trunks reaching far up into the air.

"If only I get an even break," he whispered to himself.

"Now thin, it's right here thot we'll begin an' mind now, I want 'em cut close to the ground so's thar'll be no waste."

Mike and Donald, without waiting for the men

to begin work, started back up the bank as the Irishman had told him that he wanted to talk over some business with him.

"Niver let thim know as how ye're watchin' thim," he said as soon as they were out of hearing.

A few minutes later as they were making their way to the stables a loud crash told them that the first tree was down.

"That's number one," Donald laughed his eyes shining with eagerness.

After an hour spent inspecting the camp the two returned to the office.

"Now, I'll get me saw an' we'll show thim fellers a thing or two about the lumber business," Mike declared as he took down from the wall of the back room an old cross-cut saw. "If I had as many dollars as this oul saw has cut down trees sure an' it's meself as could retire in comfort an' plenty," he told the boy as he gazed affectionately at the long blade.

Returning to the lake shore they found the place humming with industry, some of the men sawing through the big trunks while others were trimming the branches from those already down. There was no sign of any loafing, a fact which pleased the boy beyond measure.

"If they keep this pace up there'll be no trou-

ble about that contract," he told Mike in low tones.

"They're beginning good fer a fact, but ye never can tell aboot 'em," Mike replied as he stepped up to a giant spruce growing only a few feet from the lake. "Let's tackle this feller," he said as he threw off his heavy mackinaw.

Donald followed his example and in another moment the keen blade was biting into the hard wood as if anxious to come out the other side. Not until the saw was half way through did Mike stop.

"Wait a bit till I git a wedge," he said as he started for a stump a few yards away where he had placed the bag containing the wedges.

Donald was puffing heavily, although he tried his best to conceal it from the Irishman. It would take, he knew, several days to get his muscles hardened and his wind properly seasoned.

Mike was back in a minute with a steel wedge about a foot long. This he drove into the cut and the sawing began again. And now the work was less arduous as they were obliged to stop every few minutes while Mike hit the wedge with an axe driving it farther into the cut, thus preventing the saw from binding.

The saw was almost through when Mike gave the signal to stop.

"Reckon she'll go over now," he said as he loosened one of the handles and removed it from the blade. "Pull her out now an' we'll see."

Donald pulled the saw from the tree and stepped back while Mike picked up a heavy axe. As he drove the wedge deeper and deeper into the cut the huge tree began to incline slightly toward the lake. Faster and faster it moved until, with a mighty crash, it fell.

"Prutty good time thot for the fust one," Mike grinned. "Now we'll see how long it'll take ter trim her up."

As fast as the trees were trimmed they were rolled with the cant-dogs and piled on the ice close to the shore. By the time the horn blew for dinner Donald was pleased to see that the pile had grown to quite respectable dimensions.

"Don't wait for me, Mike," he said. "I'll be up just as soon as I get these few limbs off."

At the first blast of the horn the men dropped their tools and started for the camp. Donald was bending over as he chopped off the last of the branches of a big spruce, when he felt something fly past his head. He glanced around quickly and saw Jacques Bolduc standing about ten feet away and in his hand was an axe handle

minus its head. A look of fear, whether real or feigned the boy was unable to say, was on his face. For an instant neither spoke then the breed stammered:

"Dat head she no on tight, she come off."

"So I noticed," Donald said as he stepped toward the man. "Don't you know that you should examine the head of a new axe to see if it is properly wedged on?"

"Oui, me look at heem. She look all right."

"Well, you want to be more careful in the future. That came mighty close to my head," Donald snapped as he started for the mess house.

He had little doubt but that it was a deliberate attempt to injure him and his first thought had been to discharge the man at once. But, on second thought, he realized that after all it might have been an accident and decided to give the man the benefit of the doubt. However, he should be warned and he waited until the breed caught up with him.

"The next time anything of that sort happens you'll have to get out," he said sternly. "I can't afford to have a careless man in the crew. It's too risky."

Jacques was very profuse in his promises to

examine his axe in the future and Donald decided to say no more about it.

"Just the same I'll be on the watch next time," he thought as he opened the door and entered the camp.

For a week the work progressed rapidly. The giants of the forest fell with almost amazing speed and the pile of logs grew at a most satisfying rate.

The food, as Donald had promised, continued good. In Tony Martino, Mike had secured a treasure and Donald often wondered how he was able to serve such good meals at so little cost. For a helper Tony had a boy about fifteen years of age whom he had brought with him and whom he called Splinters, a name well suited to him. Splinters was five feet and six inches tall and weighed eighty pounds.

"Don, me bye," Mike said one night as they were trudging from the cutting, "ter-morrer's the last day of November and the last day to shoot deer. What say ye take the day off and see if ye can git us a good buck? It's meself as thinks the men would be glad fer a taste o' venison."

"Good thought, old man. I'll get an early start and if I come back without a deer it'll be because there aren't any round here."

It still lacked a half hour of dawn when, the following morning Donald strapped on his snowshoes and, with his rifle over his shoulder, struck off through the deep forest. A little later he sat down on a fallen trunk knowing that he was fully as apt to sight a deer by keeping still as by walking around. For all of an hour he sat there listening intently for the sound of a breaking twig or the rustle of a branch which would tell him that game was near.

He was about to move on when a sound reached his ears which made him instantly alert. He grasped his rifle and strained his eyes to peer through the dense trees. At first he could see nothing but presently a large buck with wide spreading antlers broke through the trees about thirty feet from where he was sitting. The buck stopped and lifted its head and sniffed the air as though scenting danger.

Donald raised his rifle and fired. As the shot rang through the forest a second report, coming so soon after he had pressed the trigger that it sounded almost an echo, came from a short distance to his right. The buck leaped into the air and fell to the snow.

Donald, uncertain whether he had really heard the second report, started toward the

fallen buck and had nearly reached it when an angry voice called:

"That's my deer."

Donald turned at the sound of the voice and beheld a sight which gave him one of the greatest surprises of his life. There, not more than ten feet away, stood one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen. She was on snow-shoes, her feet covered with soft moccasins which reached nearly to her short plaid skirt. She wore a light brown sweater and her head was covered by a bright green toque. In her hands she carried a rifle similar to his own. The crisp morning air had brought the color to her cheeks and her dark flashing eyes completed a picture which, he thought, was the most beautiful he had ever seen.

"I told you that deer was mine," she snapped taking a step toward him.

Donald snatched off his cap.

"Pardon me, Miss, but I was so startled that I forgot to acknowledge the fact the first time you spoke," he said.

"Then you do acknowledge it?"

"Why, I—I——" he stammered but she cut him short.

"It makes no difference whether you do or

not," she declared in a disagreeable tone. "I shot him and he's mine."

Donald put his cap back on his head.

"Of course——" he began again but once more she interrupted him.

"Didn't I tell you that it was my shot which killed him?"

He had intended to acknowledge her ownership of the deer in spite of the fact that he felt sure that his shot had killed it, but her attitude caused a revulsion of feeling to take possession of him and he replied:

"I believe you did say so but that doesn't prove it you know."

"I don't know anything of the sort," she snapped her black eyes flashing with anger. "Why I had a dead bead on him."

"So did I for that matter and I shot first."

"You did nothing of the kind," she insisted taking another step forward.

"Well, I guess there's no use in arguing that point," Donald declared calmly. "May I ask at what part of the deer you aimed?"

"Why just behind the shoulders."

"Then it ought not to be hard to settle the matter, as I aimed for the forehead. You see he was facing me," he explained.

The girl made no reply but advanced until she was standing close to the buck.

"You can see where my shot struck," Donald said as he pointed to the hole squarely between the eyes. "Now we'll see if we can find where your shot took effect."

The girl watched him as he turned the buck over and bent to examine its side.

"I don't seem to be able to find any mark," he said after a thorough search. "Suppose you look."

He relinquished his place and she bent over the slain animal.

"I know I hit it just the same," she declared as she finally straightened up.

Donald said nothing but, in spite of himself, a faint smile parted his lips. Had it not been for that smile their meeting might have had a different ending. But she saw it and the sight seemed to infuriate her.

"Take the old deer, you—you robber," she cried her eyes snapping with anger.

"Now see here, I——" but she would not allow him to continue.

"Don't you dare speak to me," she almost screamed and, turning she started off as rapidly as she could walk.

Donald made no effort to stop her.

"Can you beat that?" he mused as she disappeared through the trees. "I pity the poor fellow that marries her. She could have had the deer and welcome if she'd been decent about it. My, but she's a beauty just the same."

Had he but known the far reaching influence of the meeting on his future it is doubtful if he would have dismissed the affair from his mind so readily.

As the buck was far too heavy for him to carry he decided to return at once to the camp and come back for it with a toboggan which he remembered to have seen out by the horse shed.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when he finally dragged the buck into camp. Mike had come up to the tool house for an extra axe and was just starting back when Donald hailed him.

"Here's your venison, Mike."

"Sure enough an' ye did get one," Mike grinned as he turned back and approached the buck. "Sure an' he's a beauty. Tin prongs. Now what jer know aboot thot. Eight's the biggest I iver shot meself."

He had decided to say nothing about the affair with the girl and, as soon as Mike had finished admiring the trophy, he dragged it around back to the cook-house.

"We'll have some steaks what'll mak' yer mouth water for supper," Tony promised him.

It was shortly after the noon meal and Donald had started for the cutting when he saw a man approaching from the direction in which he had been earlier in the day. As he came nearer the boy saw that he was a tall well-built man seemingly about twenty-five years old, and a stranger to him.

"Good afternoon," Donald greeted him pleasantly as soon as he was within easy speaking distance.

The man scowled but did not return the salutation.

"You the fellow who shot a deer this morning?" he demanded.

"I am a fellow who shot a deer this morning," Donald returned slightly angered at the man's tone.

"Don't get saucy," the man snapped. "What I want to know is if you're the fellow who shot the deer that Miss Snow was about to shoot."

So her name was Snow.

"Sorry, but you see I haven't the pleasure of Miss Snow's acquaintance," Donald smiled determined to keep his temper down.

"Well, I guess you're the fellow all right. Now what I want to know is, why you did it."

"Why I did what?"

"Shot the deer when she was about to shoot. Don't you know that it is good manners to let a lady have the first chance?"

"But I didn't know that she was within a hundred miles of the place till after I had shot the deer," he explained.

"Tell that to the marines," the man sneered. "Miss Snow says that you turned and saw her before you shot."

"Then Miss Snow tells what——" Donald began but stopped before completing the sentence and substituted, "Miss Snow is mistaken."

"You mean to say she lies?" the man demanded taking a step forward.

"I said she was mistaken."

"It's the same thing."

"Not at all. She may have thought that I saw her before I shot. I simply insist that I did not."

"Insist and be hanged," the man snapped. "I believe what she says."

"May I say that it matters little to me what you believe?" Donald asked nearly at the limit of his patience.

But the man, ignoring his question, started on another tack.

"She also says that you grossly insulted her."

"I deny that," Donald said sharply.

"That'll do you no good. I expected you would. Any one who'll insult a lady'll deny it."

"If Miss Snow says that I insulted her she says what is not true." Donald again denied the accustation looking the man squarely in the eye.

"And I say you did. And you've got to answer to me for it."

"In what way?"

"I'm going to give you a licking that will teach you to respect a lady."

"Indeed. And may I ask when the lesson is to begin?"

"Do you want it here where you can call your men to rescue you or are you man enough to go back a bit in the woods where I'll have a fair show?"

The boy smiled as he noted that the man was at least forty pounds heavier and several inches taller in addition to being several years older than he.

"I'll go anywhere you say," he agreed. "Excuse me a moment till I get my snow-shoes."

Donald had tarried behind the men for a short time after finishing his dinner to watch

Tony as he cut up the buck, so it happened that no one was within hearing distance while the two were talking.

"All ready now. Lead on," he said a moment later after he had strapped on the shoes.

The man turned and started back the way he came and Donald followed a few feet behind. He could not help smiling at the man's awkwardness in managing his snow-shoes. Several times he nearly tripped as one shoe over lapped the other. But he managed to keep his feet.

"I only hope he's as awkward with his fists," he thought.

The man stopped beneath the heavy branches of a big spruce where the snow was only a few inches deep.

"Guess this'll do as well as any place," he said looking at the boy a half sneer on his dark face.

"Suits me," Donald replied calmly slipping his feet from his snow-shoes.

"Of course if you want to change your mind about the apology——" the man began but Donald interrupted.

"I told you before that I have done nothing to apologize for. If I had I'd have made it

back there, so let's get on with the lesson. I have work to do."

"You may not feel like doing it when I get through with you," the man sneered as he bent over to untie the thongs which fastened his snow-shoes to his feet.

"Maybe not," Donald threw off his heavy mackinaw as he spoke.

"We'll dispense with shaking hands," the man said as he advanced and raised his fists.

"Just as you say."

It did not take Donald more than a few seconds to learn that his antagonist knew more than a little regarding the science. In the first exchange of blows he received a punch on the side of his face which sent him reeling back. The blow taught him a lesson and as the other sprang forward to follow up his advantage, he jumped quickly to one side and succeeded in landing a fairly stiff punch on his chin as he turned.

The blow seemed to anger the man and he rushed at the boy as if intending to finish the fight then and there. Donald, who was like a flash of lightning on his feet, had little trouble in dodging. In fact, for some minutes he succeeded in keeping just beyond reach of his enemy's fists. The man was, he could see, growing

more and more angry as blow after blow met nothing more substantial than the air. This was exactly as Donald wished. He could see that the foot work was beginning to tell on the man's wind, and made to effort to return his blows.

"Why don't you stand still and fight?" the man snapped as Donald dodged a particularly vicious swing.

The man stood still breathing heavily.

"You're giving me the licking remember," Donald grinned. "You surely don't expect me to make it any easier for you than I can help, do you?"

"Suppose we rest a bit," the man suggested.

"Rest nothing. I'm not a bit tired and, as I told you, I have work to do. Come on and get it over."

With an angry cry the man sprang forward and again Donald adopted the same tactics. He was really beginning to enjoy it as he found that he had no trouble in keeping out of the way. Round and round they flew, the man wasting his strength beating the air and the boy smiling as each blow failed to land. He knew that the man was far from being in good physical training and no longer had any fear regarding the

result. He grew a bit careless and as a result failed to dodge quickly enough. The blow caught him square on the nose. Had it been earlier in the fight while the man was fresh it would undoubtedly have knocked him down but, as it was, the blow lacked much of the force with which the man had started. Still the blow hurt and brought the blood freely. He had not intended to force the fighing quite so soon but the blow angered him and he at once assumed the offensive.

Springing forward he aimed a blow which landed on the man's chin. It was only a light tap, however, as he struck a fraction of a second too soon.

The man, as if glad that at last he had his prey within reach, threw caution to the winds and rained blow after blow on the boy. Donald did not attempt to escape, knowing that the man was too nearly winded to do much damage even when he landed. He warded the blows off with his hands, although one or two hit his face. The chance, for which he was waiting, came soon and this time the distance was right. Squarely on the point of the chin he landed and the man went down without a sound.

As he fell an exclamation, coming from be-

hind him, made Donald turn quickly. There, not ten feet off, stood the girl of the morning.

"Oh, you've killed him," she gasped as she brushed past him and bent over the prostrate man.

"Not quite so bad as that. He's only knocked out," he assured her.

"You brute," she turned to him with a look of hatred on her handsome face.

Donald could think of no answer to this accusation so he kept silent.

"I said you were a brute," she repeated.

"I heard you the first time."

"Well, why don't you say something?"

"There doesn't seem to be anything to say," he smiled. "You surely do not expect me to contradict a lady."

"I'd expect you to do anything," she snapped.

Just then the man moaned and opened his eyes.

"You're not dead," she cried.

The man's eyes met hers.

"Kate!"

The word was spoken so low that Donald just caught it.

"If you will permit——" Donald began stepping forward, but she snapped,

"Don't you dare come near me."

"Certainly not." He stepped back.

"How do you feel, Frank?" she asked solicitously.

"I'll be all right in a minute," he replied. "If my foot hadn't caught on that root he couldn't have hit me."

Donald smiled as he heard the words, but he said nothing until the man had struggled to his feet, then he asked pleasantly:

"Shall we call this the end of the first lesson?"

"I'll attend to you later," the man growled as he reached for his coat.

"You know my address," Donald said lightly as he, too, pulled on his mackinaw.

"Is there a sporting camp near here?" Donald asked Mike that night after supper.

"Faith an' thar's a peach of a new one aboot two miles down the lake."

"Do you know who owns it?"

"Feller by the name of Duke. Lives in Waterville."

"Is it the Duke who's president of The Northern Star?"

"Yep, thot's the guy."

"Do you know if he has a son?" Donald asked a bit anxiously.

"Yep. He's a big feller name o' Frank. He's thar now or leastwise he was a few days ago. Why?"

"Nothing. I was just wondering."

CHAPTER V

TINY TIM

There was no let up in the work. Mike was one of those rare characters who possessed the ability of getting the utmost out of a crew without seeming to drive them. By the end of the second week they had worked back from the lake to a point where it was necessary to haul the logs on big drags to the shore of the lake. There had been no more snow and a warm spell had thawed much of the first fall until there remained barely enough to make sledding.

"If we don't git snow prutty soon we'll have ter cut out the haulin'," Mike declared as he and Donald were trudging back to camp at the end of the day's work. "The tote road's gittin' prutty thin in spots."

"Feels as though it might snow before morning," Donald replied glancing at the sky.

He proved a good prophet, for before they reached the grub-house a few stray flakes drifted slowly to earth, and it was snowing hard by the time supper was over.

"If it keeps up at this rate till morning we'll have snow enough," Donald told Mike as they were crossing over to the office.

"Here's hopin'," Mike said as he pushed open the door.

The snow continued steadily all night and, when Donald opened the door in the morning he found that fully two feet had fallen.

"Here's snow enough for you, Mike," he shouted as he turned back into the room.

It was still dark when, a few minutes later the two ploughed their way to the office. The snow continued to fall but a rift in the clouds where the moon was striving to peep through, evidenced that, as Mike put it, "the storm was on its last legs." He was right as usual when it came to a weather prediction, for by nine o'clock the sun was shining brightly. Donald was in high spirits. There would be no let up in the work because of a lack of snow for some time at least. The men were working well and seemed to be satisfied. There had been no sickness in the camp not even a cold. The future indeed seemed bright.

It was when they were returning from the cutting for dinner that Donald grasped Mike by the arm and said,

"What's that pounding off there?"

Mike listened for a moment.

"Sounds like hammerin'," he declared.

"But who could be hammering in that direction? It can't be very far off."

"I dunno. 'Tain't any of our men, 'cause they all bin on the job."

"Believe I'll go take a look after dinner," Donald said as he pulled open the door of the grub-house.

The snow was light and his snow-shoes sank nearly six inches at every step as he slowly made his way through the thick timber. It was hard walking but the sound of the hammering, which was now almost continuous, had worried him and he knew that he would not be satisfied until he learned what it was.

Soon he reached a large spruce which he knew marked the boundary of his tract in that direction. The hammering now seemed but a few rods away and as he listened, the sound of voices reached his ears. He was unable to distinguish words, but it was evident that there were several men not far off.

After straining his ears for some minutes he went forward again stopping every few yards to listen. Soon he was able to catch a word now and then but, as they were mostly French, he was unable to catch the drift of the conversa-

tion. But a few moments later he had reached the edge of a small clearing and, peeping out from behind a tree, he saw a half dozen men busily engaged in knocking together a shed of rough boards. A bearded giant, well over six feet, seemed to be in charge. For perhaps fifteen minutes the boy watched them and then started back. Why he had not made his presence known and asked the question which was troubling him, he could not have explained. But something seemed to warn him that he had better not.

He had to acknowledge to himself that he was more worried, as he made his way back to camp, than he had been before he saw the men. Why, he could not tell. He believed that they were about to start lumbering operations and the thought was by no means pleasant. Why should any one start an operation so late in the season? In what way could it effect him? Who was doing it? These were the questions which puzzled him.

Mike was in the little office when he got back.

"Well, an' did ye locate it?" he asked.

"I sure did. Half a dozen men are building a shack about fifty rods from our line."

"Ye don't mane it."

"Unless my eyes deceived me that's right."

"An' what did they say it was fur?"

"I didn't ask 'em. In fact, they didn't see me."

"An' why not didn't ye?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Donald replied slowly. "Something seemed to tell me it would be best not to."

"An' it's meself thot's not sure, but ye did the right thing not to." Mike mused after a moment's thought. "But sure an' it's late ter start a cuttin' now."

"That's just what's worrying me," Donald acknowledged.

"Well, I 'spose 'tis none of our business jest so they kape on their side the line."

"Guess you're right about that, but just the same I don't like it."

"What can't be cured must be endured," Mike quoted and then suddenly asked. "Ye didn't happen ter know iny of 'em, did ye?"

"No."

"But what did they look like?"

"Oh, they were breeds. About the usual run. That is all but one who seemed the boss. He was not a breed, I'm sure. He must be almost six feet six and can't weigh less than three hundred."

"Did he have whiskers?" Mike asked quickly.

"All over his face," Donald laughed.

"Black?"

"As a coal."

"I know him. It's Tiny Tim."

"Tiny Tim! What a name."

"Ain't it a fact? But thot's what they call him, and he's sure bad medicine. Used to live up in Aroostuck county, but has been round here fer the past two er three years. Been in jail a dozen times fer sellin' whiskey an' once he killed a man but got off on a plea o' self defense. Didn't no one believe it though? He's a tough customer so he is."

"Not a very pleasant man for a neighbor as you describe him."

"He's not, that." Mike shook his head.

"Well, if he lets us alone we'll return the compliment," Donald said as he hung his snowshoes on a nail.

Mike said nothing more about the matter but Donald was aware that he was by no means easy in his mind and the knowledge did not lessen his own uneasiness.

"Well, I'll go down and scale what they've cut to-day," he said as he started for the lake.

During the next few days sounds indicating the activity of their new neighbors were constantly in the air. On the day following Don-

ald's visit the sound of falling trees told them that the heavier work of constructing the grub-house had begun. Donald and Mike had had several talks regarding the possible effect which the operation might have on his contract but they could only surmise.

Then one day about ten o'clock, as he apprcached the cutting he saw the man, who Mike had assured him was Tiny Tim, talking with a number of his men. His first impulse was to order the man off, but he quickly saw that the act would be foolish as he had no proof that he had any evil intentions.

Donald was within a few feet of the big man before the latter saw him.

"You have some mighty good timber here, Mr. Price," he said in good English as he took a step forward.

"It is pretty good," Donald agreed pleasantly.

"Good's I've ever seen and that's saying something," the man boasted.

"You're going to do some cutting down below?" Donald asked easily.

"Yes, we're about ready to begin."

"Starting rather late, aren't you?"

"A bit. But better late than never."

"Who are you cutting for, if it's a fair question?" Donald asked.

"Fair enough. I'm cutting for myself," the giant grinned.

"I thought that land belonged to the Northern Star."

"It does, but I've leased a hundred acres."

Donald knew that the man was lying. In the first place the Northern Star never leased its land and in the second place the man's face, when he made the statement, told almost as plainly as words that he did not expect or even desire him to believe it.

Donald turned away a newly awakened fear clutching at his heart. From a distance he watched the giant out of the corner of his eye as he moved about among the members of the crew, until he judged that he had talked with about half of them. Then, as if satisfied with his call, he struck off in the direction of the new camp. The boy said nothing regarding his suspicions even to Mike. He felt that if they were founded on fact nothing could be done and if not it would be foolish to worry him about it. Perhaps, after all, he had jumped at conclusions too quickly. Anyhow he would wait and see.

He did not have long to wait. The following morning ten men were missing. The fact that the night before he had paid all the men up to

date, it being the time called for in their verbal contract, left little doubt as to where they had gone. In spite of the fact that he had expected it, it was a crushing blow to the boy. Unless he could quickly get others to take their places he would be unable to keep his contract with the Northern Star. And none better than he knew how difficult it would be to hire men at that time of year.

"The mane beast," Mike roared when Donald told him what had happened. "Sure an' it's a wonder he didn't take all of 'em."

"I think I can understand that part of it," Donald declared as he touched a match to the kindling in the little office stove.

"Thin ye're on ter more than I am," Mike insisted.

"Maybe and maybe not. But this is the way it looks to me. I believe that Tiny Tim, as you call him, is working for the Northern Star and was sent up here to break me. He has probably offered the men better wages and——"

"But why didn't he take 'em all?" Mike interrupted.

"Well, you see, it's like this. If I don't meet the terms of my contract, what logs we have will be on my hands and they probably think they can get them at their own price so they

want me to get just as many as possible just so I don't get enough. They probably figured that if he took all our men I'd give up but by leaving us what they have they hope that we'll go ahead and try our best to do the job with what men we have. How does it strike you?"

"Begorra an' it hits me hard," Mike groaned. "An' what ye goin' ter do aboot it?"

"What can I do?"

"I dunno at all at all." Mike scratched his head in his perplexity.

"I know one thing that I am going to do. I'm going to see that fellow right after breakfast and tell him what I think of him," Donald declared.

"Mooch good it'll be after doin' ye, but I dunno's I blame ye."

At that moment the breakfast horn sounded and they made their way across the clearing. During the meal there was much talk among the men regarding the desertion. It was plain that most if not all of those who had remained were not in sympathy with the action. Whether this was because of pique at not being included in the number or an expression of loyalty to him Donald was unable to tell. He was somewhat surprised that neither Jacques Bolduc or Pierre Lareau were among the deserters. They

were the best sawers in the crew and he could not understand why Tiny Tim had overlooked them.

"Perhaps he was afraid he'd weaken my crew too much," he thought.

As soon as breakfast was over he made a short speech in which he told them what he suspected.

"But I'm not licked yet," he concluded. "If you fellows will stick by me I'll get more men if it's a possible thing and we'll beat them in spite of all they can do. And that bonus will be one hundred dollars."

The men were loud in their promises to stick and he felt encouraged in spite of his knowledge regarding their character and how little their word was really worth.

It was with conflicting emotions that he fastened on his snow-shoes and started off a few minutes later.

"Now don't ye go an' git inter a fight," Mike cautioned. "Sure an' thot Tiny'd make mince meat out o' ye in less'n no time."

Donald promised to be careful and with a wave of his hand soon disappeared through the thick spruces. He slowed down as soon as he was out of sight of the office and began to think. He was not at all sure that he was doing the

wise thing. He had little or no hope of being able to accomplish anything which would help him and he was well aware that he could very easily make a bad matter worse. But it wouldn't do to back out now, he told himself. The men would think he was afraid and they had little use for a coward.

He had gone but a short distance when the sound of a falling tree reached him and soon he could hear voices. He had decided that a bold front would be best, so he made no effort at concealment as he reached the edge of the clearing. About twenty-five men, he judged, were at work and he had no difficulty in recognizing his former employees. He passed within a few feet of two of them on his way to the board shack but they pretended not to see him and he gave them no notice. He was sure that it would be a waste of time to talk with them.

When he was within a few feet of the shack the door suddenly opened and Tiny Tim stepped out. He saw Donald at once.

"Good morning, Mr. Price," he greeted him, trying to make his voice sound as pleasant as possible.

Donald ignored the outstretched hand.

"I've come to ask what you mean by hiring my men away from me," he said.

Tiny Tim smiled.

"I needed 'em."

"And I suppose you thought I didn't."

"Well, to tell the truth I guess I didn't think much about that part of it. I needed 'em and what I need I always get."

"Do you know how what you have done is looked at by the lumbermen of the state?"

"No, I don't know and what's more I don't care. I needed the men and they chose to work for me. That's all there is about it. If you think it best to start anything go ahead."

Donald was about to make an angry reply when the door again opened and the man who had "give him the lesson" stepped out into the snow.

"I thought so," Donald said loudly enough for the two men to hear.

"You thought what?" Duke demanded.

"That you were at the bottom of a mighty mean trick," Donald said stoutly.

Duke advanced until he stood close in front of Donald before he spoke again.

"You licked me the other day," he said slowly. "I didn't believe you could do it and I don't believe you can do it again, but I'm not going to give you the chance to try. You see that quick foot work of yours was too much for a

man of my build that time and it might be again. But no man has ever got the better of me in the long run and you're not going to be the first. I know all about your contract with the Northern Star and I'm going to see that you fall down on it. Is that plain?"

"It's plain enough that you're going to try but that's as far as I can see just at present."

"Well, your vision will be enlarged as time goes on."

"Maybe. May I ask if your action in hiring my men away from me has the sanction of the company?"

"You can ask, yes, but I've given you all the information you'll get." Duke turned and was about to reenter the shack when Donald stopped him.

"One minute, please. I just want to tell you that your talk brands you as about the meanest——"

But Duke slammed the door shut and Donald turned away and started back.

CHAPTER VI

A CLOSE CALL

It was nearly nine o'clock when Donald got back to the office. There was no one in the building but the room was warm, a good bed of coals remaining in the stove. He threw in a couple of pieces of wood and sank down in a chair. It was mighty tough, he told himself, that this trouble had to crop up. He had known all along that certain things could easily cause delay in the work and had been prepared to meet them without whining but this seemed so needless.

He was trying to think a way out when the door flew open and Mike entered.

"So yees are back, eh?"

"Yes, I'm back. Didn't accomplish anything either except to learn that Duke's at the bottom of the mess and that he's going to break me if he can. Oh, he told me so in so many words."

"He's a mane skunk, so he is," Mike hit the table a fierce blow with his fist.

"Granted. He's all of that and, just at pres-

ent he seems to have the whip hand," Donald agreed. "But I'm not done," he added getting to his feet.

"That's the bye. Niver say die. But what ye goin' ter do?"

"I'm going after more men, of course. We've got to have them. That's flat."

"It's flat enough all right, but where ye goin' ter git 'em? Answer me that?"

"I'll get them if I have to hog tie them and bring them in. I'm going to get a bite and start for Greenville right away. You keep things going while I'm gone. Can't tell when I'll get back but when I do it'll be with a crew."

In less than half an hour later he was on his way to the road. He had waved Mike a cheery good-bye although, to tell the truth, he was far from feeling as confident as he had tried to appear. He fully realized the task he was up against. But he also knew that he was taking the only course which gave even a slight promise of success. He must have more men in order to win out, therefore the obvious thing to do was to try to get them.

"Sounds easy," he grinned as he trudged along his snow-shoes making the dry snow creak.

As soon as he reached the road he removed

his snow-shoes as he found it well trodden. He had not made over a mile when he heard a car coming behind him. Turning he saw that it was a big truck and a moment later Joe Betts was inviting him to a seat by his side.

"Nice mornin' for a walk," Joe grinned as he started the truck.

"Sure is."

"What's on your mind? You seem kinder blue somehow."

Donald explained what had happened including an account of his fight with Frank Duke.

"That feller's needed a good lickin' for a long time but it's sorry I am that you had to be the one to give it to him jest at this time," Joe said as soon as he had finished.

"It's hard luck for me but I don't see how I could have done any differently."

"Course you couldn't," Joe sympathized. "But I'm afraid you'll have a hard time gittin' men this time o' year."

"I expect to."

"Expect to have a hard time to git 'em or expect to git 'em, which?"

"Both," Donald smiled.

It was shortly after eleven o'clock when the big truck drew up in front of the hotel in Green-

ville. The first man Donald saw as he leaped to the porch was Ben Sloyd.

"Mornin' Don," the man held out his hand with a grin. "Hear you've had a bit of trouble up at your cuttin'."

Donald ignored the hand. The look on Ben's face told him as plainly as words could have done that the man was exulting in his misfortune.

"Thanks for your sympathy," he said putting as much sarcasm in his voice as possible, "but I hope it's nothing serious."

He turned away and entered the hotel without giving Ben time to say anything more. He was familiar with the saying that the darkest hour was just before the dawn but he had never realized the full meaning of it until a few minutes later. As he entered the office a man, who had been sitting at a small table writing a letter, glanced up.

"Hello, Don. How's the boy?" he greeted him.

"Pretty good. How's yourself, Nick?"

"Not so good." The man, dressed in the togs of the lumberman, got up and held out his hand which Donald was quick to grasp.

Nick Jorsen was a lumberman of long stand-

ing and had been a great friend of Donald's father.

"What's wrong?" Donald asked as Nick resumed his seat.

"Better ask what ain't wrong. But sit down an' I'll tell you all about it."

Donald took the offered chair and Nick began.

"Probably you knew that I bought a strip o' timber up this side o' the West Carry last summer."

Donald nodded his head.

"Well I've had a crew at work there an' everything goin' fine when t'other day up comes a lawyer feller an' says as how Ben Sloyd claims that the land belongs to him. Can you beat it? Seems as how there's a flaw o' some kind in my deed an' the court has said I can't cut any more till the matter comes up at the next session which won't be till next May. An' I'm tied hard an' fast to pay the men till the last o' April. Can you beat it?"

"How many men you got?" Donald asked eagerly.

"Only a dozen but they're mighty fine men an' I won't break my contract with 'em not if it busts me which it pretty near will."

"Where are they now?"

"Reckon most of 'em are down at the station waiting for the train."

"What luck!"

"Luck, eh? Where d'jer git that stuff?"

"Forgive me, Nick. I'm sorry for you, of course, but it's a mighty good thing for me. I'll tell you all about it." It took him only a few minutes to explain the situation. "So you see, Nick, I'll take your crew and then you won't have to pay them, see."

"Gee, but that takes a big load off my mind," Nick declared with a sigh of relief. "Come on. We'll go down to the depot an' round 'em up."

"Think they'll want to go to work for me?"

"Sure. Why, they'll be tickled to death. You see, they're a mighty suspicious bunch so many have tried to cheat 'em an' they don't more'n half believe that I mean to pay 'em."

At the station they found the men gathered in the little waiting room and from the sounds and gesticulations it was evident that a heated discussion was going on.

"Hey, there, boys, I gotta new job for you. Same pay and better eats," Nick cried as he pushed his way into their midst.

For a moment no one spoke, then a big black whiskered half-breed, in a voice which sounded

like the deep rumble of distant thunder to Donald, asked,

"Where dis new job? Heem las' all winter, eh?"

"It sure will, Baptist, if you fellers will stick and it's up the lake about twenty miles. How 'bout it?"

"We stick she be bon grub," Baptist declared with a glance at his companions who nodded their heads in agreement.

"Righto. Here's your new boss, Donald Price, an' he'll do the fair thing by you."

About two hours later the men were all aboard the big truck with Joe Betts at the wheel and Donald on the seat beside him.

"I certainly struck it rich that time if I never do again," the boy said as Joe pressed the starter.

The crew was still in the woods when they arrived at the camp. Donald took them into the bunk-house and told them to make themselves at home. He was so eager to tell the good news to Mike that he left them there while he ran out to the cutting.

Mike saw him and waved his hand in greeting.

"Faith an' ye weren't gone long," he said as Donald came up.

"No need of staying when I got what I was after," he laughed.

"Do ye mane ter stand thar an' tell me thot ye've got a gang so quick?"

"Exactly," Donald laughed again. "When you go back to camp you'll find an even dozen huskies just stewing to get to work."

Mike scratched his head.

"An' did ye pick 'em off the trees?"

"Santa Claus brought them to me," Donald declared and they both laughed. "Come on, it's time to quit and I'll tell you all about it while we're walking back."

"If it's a gang o' Nick Jorsen's ye've got thin ye've sure got the cream o' the North, so ye have. Nick, he allays has the pick o' the bunch. Ye see the men all like him an' they come back ter him year after year," Mike declared as soon as he had finished.

Donald was not long in learning that Mike was right in what he said regarding Nick's men. The way they went at the big trees the following morning was a revelation even to him, and that day's cut scaled exactly three times as much as that of the day before.

"Kind of looks as though the new men were doing twice as much work per man as the others," Donald declared as he and Mike were

trudging back to camp at the close of the day's work.

"An' what did I tell ye," Mike grinned. "But 'tis not twice the work they're doing. Ye see, they set the pace an' the rest are trying ter kape up wid 'em."

For several days the big trees continued to fall at a rate which brought joy to Donald's heart. There was now but one thing to worry him so far as the work itself was concerned. He was conscious there was bad feeling between the two crews. Several times he had discussed the matter with Mike and he, while acknowledging the force of his fears, had advised that he make no attempt at present to remedy matters.

"Sure an' ye'll only make a bad matter worse if ye butt inter it. Whin they're in thot state o' mind sure an' they've gotter work out their own salvation, as the Bible says," he insisted.

"Do you think it's jealousy that's at the bottom of it?"

"Some. But it's meself as happens ter know thot Baptist and Jacques are inemies o' long standing. Haven't ye noticed thot they haven't had inything to say ter each other?"

"I don't know that I have."

"Well, I have. Ye see, Baptist gave Jacques a lickin' long 'bout three year ago an' he's niver

got over it. They'll have a fight afore the winter's over, ye mark my words."

It was the morning following this talk. Donald was sawing down an enormous spruce with Mike at the other end of the saw, when he caught sight of the man called Tiny Tim coming through the woods toward him. He hastened to meet the man.

"What do you want?" he demanded as soon as he was within easy speaking distance.

"That's my business," Tim grinned.

"And so long as you're on my land it's mine too," Donald snapped.

"No objection to you're thinking so, sonny," Tim leered.

"This is my land," Donald continued ignoring the man's insolence, "and I'm ordering you off."

"Is that so?" the man laughed. "And suppose I don't choose to go?"

"It's meself as reckons ye'll go, Tim." Mike had followed Donald and was now standing by his side. "If ye don't we'll be after puttin' the fear o' God in yer heart."

The man looked at Donald and Mike and evidently saw in their faces that which convinced him that they meant business for, without an-

other word, he turned and was soon lost to view in the thick forest.

"Good riddance ter bad rubbish," Mike laughed as they turned and went back to their work.

"I suppose Duke sent him to try and get some of our men."

"Niver a doubt of it," Mike agreed.

"Well, I hate to be scrapping all the time, but you've got to fight fire with something that'll put it out," Donald declared his black eyes flashing, "and if Duke wants trouble I reckon he knows where to find it."

"Now it's talkin' ye are. We'll be after givin' him as good as he sends," and Mike grinned cheerfully as he spat on his hands and seized hold of the saw handle.

Some time during the night Donald awoke suddenly. For some moments he lay in his bunk wondering what had disturbed his sleep. Far off he heard a shrill cry.

"That sounds like a wild cat," he whispered to himself: "and then again it doesn't," he added a moment later as the cry was repeated this time plainly nearer. "If I'm not mistaken it was a two-legged cat that made that noise."

As he whispered the words his ear caught a slight sound on the other side of the room. He

strained his ears to listen. Yes, someone was stealing across the floor. A moment later and he heard the door softly open and close.

He waited no longer but quietly slipped from his bunk to the floor. It took him but a minute to pull on his clothes and but a short time had elapsed since the door had closed before he was standing outside.

He had gone he judged a hundred rods or perhaps a little more when, stopping to listen, he heard heavy panting only a short distance ahead. He had evidently been gaining on the man during the last few minutes. He slowed his steps a bit not wishing to get any closer.

Suddenly the hoot of on owl broke the stillness only a short distance ahead to be followed almost at once by a like sound even nearer at hand. Donald stood still and listened.

"That you, Jacques?" He barely caught the words.

"Oui, eet me." The reply was much more plainly heard.

"This way, a bit to your right." The first voice was now a trifle nearer.

Donald waited a minute or two then stole noiselessly forward every sense keenly alert. After a few steps he paused behind a big spruce and listened. He could hear the two men

plainly enough to understand most of what they were saying. Although he was unable to see them he knew that it was Tiny Tim who was talking with Jacques. There was no mistaking that deep rumbling voice.

"You want to make a hundred dollars easy, eh?" he heard the man ask.

"Mebby oui, mebby non. Eet all depend," the breed answered.

"Scared, eh?"

"Non. Me no geet scared. Me only careful, oui. Me no like jail."

"There'll be no trouble about this if you do just as I say and you'll have a hundred dollars all in nice new bills."

"What you want me do, eh?"

"I want you to take this little bottle and in the morning I want you to slip out into the kitchen and, when no one's looking, pour its contents into the coffee. Easy way to earn a hundred dollars, eh?"

"What een heem bottle?"

"It's only something that will make the men a bit sick for two or three days. It won't hurt them a mite."

"What for you want mak' 'em seek, eh?"

"We want to hold up the work. See here,

you don't like that young Price do you? Didn't I hear that he gave you a licking one day?"

"Oui, me no like heem. Me geet heem some time bon."

"I thought so. Well, you'll never have a better chance to get even with him. If he don't get his lumber cut in time he'll lose all his money and that'll hurt him a good deal more than anything you can do to him."

"An' you say eet no hurt 'em?"

"Not a bit. It'll only make them sick and not able to work fer about a week. Then they'll be as well as ever."

"All right. Geeve me der monies an' I dose der coffee."

"You'll dose the coffee first, my friend, then you'll get the money."

"How me know dat, eh?"

"Don't I tell you so?"

"Oui, but mebby you one beeg liar."

For some time the two men argued, each being afraid to trust the other. Finally they compromised. Jacques was to receive fifty dollars at once and the rest the following night provided he had accomplished the deed.

While listening to the talk an idea had come to Donald and, as soon as he was sure that the man was going to accept the bribe, he made for

the camp with all the speed he could muster. Reaching the office he entered and from a drawer in the desk he took an old sheet, one of several he had brought from home to be used for bandages in case of an accident. Quickly he cut two slits for armholes and two small holes for his eyes.

This done he hurried back to a big pine which stood about a hundred yards from the camp. Quickly he pulled the sheet over his head adjusting it so that he could see from the eye holes. The sheet covered him completely and he chuckled as he crouched behind the tree waiting for his quarry.

The snow had stopped some half hour earlier and now the moon was peeping out through a rift in the clouds making it possible to see for a distance of several feet. It seemed a long time before his ears caught the heavy breathing of the breed as he ploughed his way step by step through the snow, but in reality it was only a few minutes.

Donald waited until he was only a few feet away and then gave a low groan. Jacques halted as if undecided whether or not he had heard anything, but a louder groan immediately convinced him that he had.

"What dat?" Donald heard him mutter.

Another groan still louder and the blood began to congeal in the breed's veins, and he could feel the thick hair rising beneath his cap.

"Jacques Bolduc."

Donald spoke the two words in a deep sepulchral voice and at the same time, with arms outstretched, he stepped out from behind the tree.

Jacques was only four or five feet away and, at the sight of the sheeted figure, he gave one wild shriek and pitched forward into the snow. For a moment Donald watched him and, when he saw that he did not move, he threw off the sheet and stepped to his side. Jacques had fainted. There was no doubt about it. Donald quickly placed his ear over the breed's heart and, as soon as he had ascertained that it was beating, hurriedly searched his pockets until he found the small bottle. This he slipped into his own pocket and then began rubbing the breed's face with snow.

In a short time Jacques began to show signs of returning consciousness but Donald continued the treatment.

"Der ghost," Jacques gasped struggling to sit up.

"Take it easy, old man," Donald cautioned.

"But der ghost, der ghost."

"There's no ghost here. What are you talking about?"

"Me see ghost. Heem mos' twenty feet high, an' an' heem call Jacques Bolduc."

By this time the breed had struggled to his feet.

"That must have been some ghost. But what are you doing out here at this time of night?" Donald demanded.

"Me—me tak' leetle walk," he stammered. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought he asked:

"How you come be out here, eh?"

"I heard you yell," Donald replied.

"Dat ghost heem yell, no me."

"Well, somebody yelled and I found you here in the snow. But you'd better get back to bed before you get your death of cold."

The breed was still very shaky but he managed to stumble back to the house without any help from Donald who followed close behind him.

"Go easy so as not to wake any of the others," Donald cautioned as he opened the door.

Jacques tumbled into his bunk without undressing and, after waiting a few minutes, Donald noiselessly opened the door again and stepped out. Quickly he made his way back to

where he had thrown the sheet and, folding it, returned it to its place in the desk drawer. This done he went back to the bunk-house and was soon between the blankets.

"I'll bet Jacques goes out to look for that sheet the first thing in the morning," he chuckled. "I think he more than half suspected me, but it doesn't make much difference so long as I got the bottle," he added just before he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORM

THE following day was Sunday and breakfast was not served until eight o'clock. It was just breaking day when Donald awoke. His bunk was almost directly across the room from Jacques' and it was just half past seven when he saw the breed swing his feet to the floor. Donald could see that he was hunting through his pockets but it was still too dark for him to catch the expression on his face. Soon he began a search of his bunk and, failing to find what he was after, he crept noiselessly to the door which he opened without making the slightest sound, and passed out.

"Hunt all you like," Donald chuckled as he sank back in his bunk, "but I hardly think you will find what you're after."

Breakfast was on the table when the breed returned. He cast a malignant look at Donald as he took his seat but the boy gave no sign that he noticed it.

"Come over to the office in a few minutes,"

he whispered to Mike as he got up from the table.

He had just lighted the fire in the office stove when Mike joined him.

"An' what's on your mind, son?" he asked as soon as he had closed the door.

Mike listened while Donald related the events of the preceding night.

"The murthering skunk," he cried when the boy had finished. "Faith an' it's meself as didn't think he'd dare go thot far."

"Nor I," Donald agreed. "But here's the bottle."

Mike took the bottle and with the aid of a small cork screw in the back of his pocket knife, pulled out the stopper. Carefully he put it to his nose and smelled.

"Faith an' I dunno what the blamed stuff is," he declared handing the bottle back.

"Not very much smell to it," Donald said after he had sniffed several times. "Now, we want to hide it where there'll be no danger of Jacques' finding it. I think he knows pretty well by now that I've got it."

"An' it's him thot'll try to find it. Let's see now where we kin hide it."

"I have it," Donald declared a moment later.

"You keep an eye toward the bunk-house and see that no one comes this way."

He went in the tool room and was back in a minute with a large bit and brace. Quickly he bored a hole about six inches deep in one of the logs just back of the stove. In this he placed the bottle. It took but a short time to whittle out a plug which he drove in till it was flush with the log. Next he glued over the plug a bit of bark which he cut from another log fitting it so carefully that after he had finished Mike declared that no one could detect it even with microscope.

"I hardly think he'll find it," Donald chuckled as he swept up the shavings.

Faith an' a body couldn't find thot in a week o' Sundays not iven if he knowed as how it was in one o' thim logs," Mike assured him.

"I'm not sure, Mike, but I think they arranged for another meeting tonight."

"An' it's meself as moves thot we attend it in place o' Jacques."

"Good, but how'll we keep him from going?"

"You jest lave thot to your Uncle Dudly," Mike grinned.

"But they may have made the appointment for sometime during the day," Donald suggested.

"We'll have ter kape an eye on him an' if he

goes away from camp we'll be on his heels."

But the breed did not leave the bunk-house all day. That he was badly frightened was plainly evident.

"Faith an' it's like a fish out o' water he is," Mike chuckled to Donald as they were eating dinner.

"He does seem kind of uneasy," Donald agreed.

It was a little after supper when Mike got a chance to whisper a word in Jacques' ear.

"If ye know whin ye're well off ye'll not lave the bunk-house this night," he said.

"I tink I go where I lak," the breed began to bluster.

"All right. But you want ter look out fer thot ghost. He'll be round tonight sure as shootin.' "

The breed's face grew as pale as was possible for one of his swarthy complexion but he turned away muttering something about not being scared of any ghost.

"Jest the same it's meself as betting ye stick close ter yer bunk the night," the Irishman chuckled.

It was a little past ten o'clock that night when a figure stole silently out of the bunk-house and

was followed a few minutes later by a second figure equally silent.

"Ye don't think he heard ye?" Mike asked as they met in the little office.

"I don't think so unless he was awake. But does it matter much if he did?" Donald asked anxiously.

"I dunno's it does. He's a coward at heart an' it's meself as doubts if a pair o' horses could pull him out o' his bunk this night."

The moon was shining brightly and its reflection on the white snow made it almost as light as day except beneath the thick trees where the branches were too thick for the rays to penetrate.

"Faith an' it's meself as wishes it was darker," Mike declared as they were fastening on their snow-shoes.

"Perhaps the moon will get behind a cloud after a bit," Donald said as he started off closely followed by his friend.

In a few minutes they reached the tree behind which Donald had hidden the night before.

"Guess we'd better hide up in the branches," Donald suggested. "Jacques may come after all and if he saw us it would spoil the whole show."

Mike agreed and in another moment they

were well hidden amid the thick branches some fifteen feet from the ground. It was many degrees below zero but they were used to the cold and, being warmly dressed, did not suffer. As Donald had hoped before a half hour passed a thick cloud had passed over the face of the moon and, although it was still light enough to see a considerable distance it was much darker than it had been when they started.

"Couldn't be better," Mike chuckled.

"Don't you think it's getting warmer?" Donald whispered.

"All of tin degrees an' it's goin' ter snow afore long."

Another half hour passed and Donald was almost asleep when he was brought to keen wakefulness by the hoot of an owl only a short distance away. He gave an answering hoot and, a moment later, peeping out between the branches he saw a dim figure making its way toward them.

"You wait here and I'll meet him," he whispered as he noiselessly slid to the ground.

He had taken but a few steps forward in the deep snow when the newcomer asked:

"That you?"

Donald gave a grunt of assent and ploughed on.

"You ain't Jacques."

"Didn't say I was," Donald replied stepping within four feet of the big man.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Seeing that I'm on my own land I might ask you the same question."

"It's none of—" Tiny Tim began but Donald interrupted:

"I know what you're here for so there's no use to waste breath. You see Jacques lost the bottle of poison you gave him last night and—"

"I gave him no bottle. You are—"

"Save your wind. I saw you give it to him and what's more I've got the bottle safe."

"But I tell you—"

"You don't need to tell me anything, but I want you to tell your boss that he's gone just a bit too far and if he tries any more of his dirty tricks I'll have him arrested for trying to poison my crew."

"But there wasn't no poison in that bottle."

"So you acknowledge that you did give Jacques a bottle?"

Aware that he had made a slip Tiny Tim snarled:

"Didn't I tell you that—"

"You don't need to tell me anything," Don-

ald interrupted. "Just get back to your camp and tell Duke what I said."

The big man took a step forward.

"For five cents I'd knock your block off," he snarled.

Donald drew off his heavy mitten and fumbled for a second in his pocket.

"Here's a nickel," he said holding out the coin. "It seems a shame to miss an opportunity for so small an amount of money."

For a moment the man glared at the coin and then, with a snarl, turned on his snow-shoes and strode away without a backward glance. Donald watched him until his form disappeared in the darkness then ploughed his way slowly back.

"Faith an' it's plenty of nerve ye've got so 'tis," the Irishman declared as he dropped to the snow. "Don't ye know thot Tiny Tim could swallow ye whole at one mouthful?"

"But he'd have to catch me first," Donald laughed as he began to fasten on his snow-shoes. "But he was wise enough not to make a bad matter worse. I reckon he recognized the fact that he's in a rather bad hole and that was what I counted on."

It was beginning to snow as they started

back, and the rising wind blew the fine flakes into their faces.

"Glad we haven't got far to go," Donald called back over his shoulder.

"Ye said sumpin," Mike grunted. "It's a goin' ter be bad afore daylight or I miss my guess."

The clock in the bunk-house was striking twelve as they carefully pushed open the door and crept softly to their bunks.

"And that's that," Donald chuckled as he pulled the blankets up close about his neck.

He awoke some hours later and glanced at the luminous face of his watch.

"Ten minutes past four," he muttered sleepily. "Hear that wind," he thought as he turned over. "I reckon Mike was right but I hope it won't be bad enough to hold up the work."

It was still dark when he again opened his eyes but a glance at his watch told him that it was time to get up. The wind was still blowing a gale, harder, he thought than he had ever experienced. The log house, strong though it was, fairly shook and the windows rattled as though a giant hand was shaking them.

As he slid from his bunk the cook came in

and lighted the big lamp which hung from a beam near the center of the room.

"Some wind, Tony," Donald said.

"She sure blow hard and lotta der snow fall, two tree feet already."

As soon as he had pulled on his clothes Donald stepped to the door and pulled it open. A swirl of snow blew in which fairly made him gasp for breath and it took all his strength to push the heavy door shut again.

"Whew! It's a regular north-easter all right," he cried as he turned and found Mike and several of the other men standing by the stove.

Breakfast was soon over and the men made preparations to start for the cutting when Donald, who had stepped outside for a moment with Mike, came in and announced that it would be impossible to do any work until the storm abated.

"Too great risk of accidents with the snow blowing so that it's impossible to see more than a couple of feet in front of your nose," he declared.

"Faith an' if it don't stop soon it'll be after taking us a week ter dig ourselves out," Mike returned with a shake of his head.

"I'll bet it's piling down at the rate of not less than an inch every ten minutes," Donald asserted as he stepped to the window and tried to look out.

Several of the men went back to bed while others gathered about the table to play cards, a favorite pastime of the great woods. A couple of the more industrious were soon hard at work making snow-shoes.

"Dis der baddest I ever sawed," Little Jerry Snowbird stamped the snow from his feet as he made his way to the stove and threw his mittens beneath it.

"Did you get the horses fed?" Donald asked.

"Oui. Me feed um but hard work get there. Heap big snow."

Jerry Snowbird was a full blooded Ojibwa Indian and, as Donald had often said, what he didn't know about horses wasn't worth knowing. He had worked for Donald's father and the boy knew that he was one he could trust.

"Heap big is right, Jerry," Donald agreed with a smile, then, turning to Mike, he said:

"Let's see if we can get over to the office."

Although it was only a few yards to the office it took the two exactly thirty minutes to make the distance. The snow was light and their

snow-shoes sank nearly a foot, making it extremely difficult to get one foot ahead of the other. Once Donald's toe caught and he pitched forward head first into a drift. He thought he would never get to his feet again but he finally accomplished it without any help from Mike who, being some distance ahead, was unaware of the boy's plight.

How the wind blew. Donald found that he had to fairly lean against it to keep his balance. The fine particles of snow driven with the velocity of bullets stung like so many needles when they struck his face. Sweeping through the trees the wind made a noise which he could liken only to that of a dozen express trains while, more than once before reaching the office a crash, which sounded above the roar of the storm, told him that some giant of the forest, perhaps somewhat decayed at the roots, had given up the fight.

In spite of the storm outside the little office seemed very cosy after they had the stove red hot and had thrown off their heavy mackinaws.

"Mike, do you know what day it is?" Donald asked suddenly.

Mike scratched his head.

"Faith an' it's Monday."

"I mean the day of the month."

Again Mike scratched his head.

"I dunno but I'd say 'twas somewhere 'long the last o' December."

"You're right. To be exact, however, it's the twenty-fourth and tomorrow is Christmas."

CHAPTER VIII

JIMMIE SHINN

The weeks went by and the first of February came. The work had been going smoothly, almost too smoothly, Donald sometimes feared. His books showed that they were several days ahead of the schedule as he had planned it. Since the big storm the day before Christmas the weather had been all that he could have desired, and the men had worked in a way that had piled up the big logs faster than he had dared hope.

There had been no further interference from Duke but instead of easing his mind it only made him more suspicious.

"He's waiting until we get most through and then, if I'm not very much mistaken, he'll spring something to hold us up," he told Mike one day as they were walking in from the cutting.

"I dunno, but it's ourselves as'll have to kape our eyes pealed," Mike replied.

All through the weeks he had kept a sharp

eye on Jacques Bolduc ever since he had made the attempt to injure him. But the man seemed to have forgotten the feud. Certainly he made no other move against him, and he had grown rather careless of late.

Another thought which often came to his mind and caused him some little worry was the attitude taken toward him by Ben Sloyd. So far as he knew the man had made no move against him unless he had done it through Duke. Sloyd was, he knew, a heavy stockholder of the Northern Star but just how much influence he had in that organization was a question which he would have liked to be able to answer.

About the middle of February he had gone to Skowhegan and had stayed over night with his mother. Sloyd had been at the station in the morning when he had started back and, although he had not spoken to him, Donald had seen him talking with another man and the way in which he had nudged his friend and chuckled as he had passed gave him cause for much uneasiness of mind. That the man was a vindictive enemy he well knew but just how far he would go in his desire to avenge his fancied wrongs, the boy was uncertain.

The cutting was now nearly an eighth of a mile from the lake as he was taking down only

the largest of the pines and spruces leaving the smaller trees for a future year. It now required the constant use of four teams to keep up with the cutters and he had added another span of horses. Mike spent nearly all of his time at the cutting picking out the trees to be felled and keeping the men busy with his words of encouragement and jokes. The men liked the jolly Irishman and he had little or no trouble with them. As Joe Betts had declared, Mike was a pastmaster when it came to handling a crew of Canucks. It was Donald's custom to work with them until noon and then, after Tony and Splinters had brought out the hot lunch dragging it over the snow on a long toboggan, he would go back with them and spend the rest of the day scaling the day's cut.

It was all the way down hill from the cutting to the lake and in one place the tote road was very steep requiring all the strength of the horses and the skill of the driver to hold back the load.

He had come down with Tony and Splinters one noon and had stepped into the bunk-house for something when a man who had been sitting in front of the stove rose and turned toward him.

Donald took one look and leaped for him.

"Jimmy Shinn or I'm a Dutchman!" he cried throwing his arms about the man and hugging him. "If you aren't a sight for sore eyes!"

"Save the pieces there, Don. But just the same it's mighty good to see you," Jimmie returned as he held Donald off and looked at him.

"But what in the world are you doing up here in the woods?"

"I'm an invalid seeking health," Jimmie grinned. "Fact," he declared as he noted the doubt in Donald's face.

"You do look a bit thin for a fact now that I look at you," Donald said slowly.

"Lost twenty pounds in the last month. Got a cold in the fall and can't seem to get rid of it. Doc told me I must quite college for a time and get away, so I came up here. Will you keep me?"

"Will I? I'll say I will and this air will knock any cold higher'n a kite in two shakes of a dog's tail. I'll say you've come to the right place."

James Shinn had been Donald's room-mate in college and if two boys ever loved each other they were the two. David and Jonathan they had been dubbed at the college.

"Have you had any dinner?" Donald demanded.

"Not yet and believe me I'm hungry."

"It's constitutional up here," Donald laughed and shouted to Tony:

"Tony, this is my best friend, Jimmie Shinn, and he's starving. Will you get him something to eat as soon as you can? I don't want him to perish on my hands."

Tony grinned as he shook hands.

"I have steak in ten minutes," he declared as he turned back to the kitchen.

"Say, Don, did he say steak?" Jimmie asked as the door closed.

"Wait till you get in front of one of Tony's steaks and you'll know what a real steak is," Donald assured him.

He had to wait only a trifle longer than Tony had said and after he had eaten the juicy two-inch steak and a big helping of fried potatoes he was ready to admit that Donald had been right.

"But how did you get up here?" Donald asked while he was eating.

"Got a ride on a truck up as far as where your trail cuts in and footed it the rest of the way. Say, Don, do you know that you've got some reputation up this way? The driver of the truck was singing your praises all the way up."

"Oh, that was Joe Betts. You mustn't pay any attention to what he says. But Joe's a mighty good fellow even if he does get a little too enthusiastic at times."

"Well, mebby so, but just the same I'd hate to have to live up to all he told me about you. No: spare your blushes because I'm not going to repeat them. You'd have to get a new cap if I did."

For an hour the two friends sat before the stove talking over old times as only two boys can. Then, with a glance at the clock, Donald said that he must go down and scale the logs.

"Doesn't do to let 'em get too far ahead of you," he explained.

"I'm going with you."

"Think you'd better?" Donald asked anxiously. "Aren't you tired?"

"After eating that steak? Say, I could lick my weight in wild cats right this minute and besides Doc told me to keep out of doors all I could."

"All right, glad to have you but this air is pretty bracing at first and you'll tire easily till you get used to it."

When the men came in to supper Donald introduced his friend to them, calling each one by name. Jimmie shook hands with them all

and told them how glad he was to know them.

"Say," he whispered to Donald a little later when they were about half through supper, "do you have eats like this all the time or is this a special for the prodigal son?"

"No: this is about our usual fare," Donald laughed. "You see it pays to feed them good," he whispered, "and Tony's an exceptional cook."

"I'll say he is," Jimmie agreed as he helped himself to another potato.

After supper the two boys went over to the office where a good fire was burning in the little stove. Mike had started it before he ate.

"Now tell me all about your winter so far," Jimmie ordered as he drew his chair up close to the stove. "I know there's something on your mind. You can't fool me, you know."

Glad to have some one to whom he could talk, Donald began with his failure to get money from the bank and told him everything.

"You're up against a mean bunch," Jimmie declared when he had finished.

"Of course I know nothing about that man Sloyd but Frank Duke is about as mean as they make 'em. I know him only slightly but that's as much as I desire. He thinks because his dad has lots of money that he owns the whole world

and a part of stars. And Kate Snow, she's much the same kind of a girl as he is a fellow. No, I don't know her, thank goodness, but Bill Grant does and he was telling me about her a while ago. Her dad's a broker in Boston and I suppose has oodles of money. Bill said she was supposed to be engaged to Duke. Fine pair they'll make."

"Don, you did one good thing if you never do another when you licked Duke. Oh, if I'd only been there to see it."

"But, Jimmie, I thought you liked pretty girls and she's a beauty."

"I know she is but you want to remember that beauty is only skin deep."

The boys talked till nearly eleven o'clock when Donald declared that they must get to bed if he was going to get up at six.

"Include me in that program," Jimmie said as he got up from his chair. "I'm going to be a full fledged member of your gang."

"All right, but you take my advice and wait a few days till you get used to the air up here," Donald advised.

But Jimmie insisted that he would be much better off if he was at work and promised to take it easy.

"Tell you what," Donald said as an idea

struck him. "You know how to drive a span of horses don't you?"

"Drive a span of horses! What do you suppose I was brought up on a farm for?"

"Then why not drive one of the teams if you're bound to do something? It's easier than sawing. You see it's like this. I had to put on an extra team a few days ago and had to take one of the Canucks for a driver and he hates it like poison and would jump at the chance to get back on a saw."

"Fine," Jimmie agreed. "I'll show you some driving that'll make 'em set up and take notice."

The next morning Jimmie tackled the job of driving one of the teams. He was as he had declared thoroughly at home when it came to driving a span of horses but Mike insisted in going on the load with him a few times to show him the ropes as he put it.

"Faith an' he'll do," he said as they returned to the cutting after taking down their third load.

As for Jimmie he was entirely in his element. Perched on the top log with the reins in his hands and a couple of spirited horses at the other end of them, as he put it, he was sure that life had little more to offer.

Donald went down with him after they had eaten the noontime lunch and was really aston-

ished at the skill with which he managed the team.

"Aren't you getting tired?" he asked as they drew up in front of the log pile.

"Tired nothing. Why this isn't work," Jimmie laughed. "And, say, I only coughed twice on the trip down. This air is wonderful."

"It'll cure you if anything will," Donald assured him.

Jimmie drove all day and as he unhitched the horses that night he told Donald that he'd never had a better time in his life.

"You sure can drive," Donald said as they started for the bunk-house.

CHAPTER IX

A CLOUD

"WHAT's the matter with that cough of yours, Jimmie?"

"What do you mean, cough?" Jimmie looked up after putting a big junk of wood in the office stove.

"Why, I mean that cough you brought up here with you a week ago," Donald laughed.

"Oh, I lost that out there in the woods a couple of days ago. I'd forgotten all about I ever had it."

"And what's more you've been putting on weight too."

"I believe you. My bunk creaks something awful now when I get into it. Believe me when I get to be a doctor I'm going to send all my patients up here no matter what ails them."

"Then I'm afraid you'll soon be without patients," Donald laughed. "But get your shoes and come with me."

"Where we going?"

"Just a little trip. You probably haven't no-

ticed it but the sound of Duke's cutting has been pretty plain the last three or four days and I have a hunch that he's on my land. Anyhow I'm going over there and find out."

"Be with you in a jiffy."

The moon was full and it was nearly as light as day even in the woods when the boys started off. No snow had fallen for nearly two weeks and it had settled down until their snow-shoes hardly sank below the surface.

"Gee! but this is one great night," Jimmie declared as he looked up at the sky studded with stars.

"If you really want to see something pretty turn around and look at the northern sky."

Jimmie had often seen the northern lights but never such a wonderful display as now. Broad streamers of light flashed up and down the heavens making a scene of beauty which defied description.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Jimmie whispered awed by the sight.

"I don't believe there's anything like it in the world," Donald replied softly.

"I thought so."

They had reached the boundary line which marked the ending of Donald's tract and he was

pointing out a tree with a gash in its trunk about ten feet from the ground.

"They're a good thirty feet over the line and I'll bet they've taken out over ten thousand feet of my timber."

"What you going to do about it?"

"For one thing I'm going right off and tell Duke. Want to come along and see the fire works?"

"You can't lose me."

There was a light in the office and without hesitation Donald stepped up and knocked on the door after removing his snow-shoes.

"Come in," a voice shouted.

Donald pushed the door open and stepped inside closely followed by Jimmie.

Frank Duke and Tiny Tim were playing cards at a small table near the stove. They glanced up as the boys entered.

"Well, what do you want?" Duke growled as he saw his visitor. "Hello Shinn, what are you doing up here?" he added as he caught sight of Jimmie.

"Oh, I'm working for Donald here. Doctor's orders, you know."

Duke turned again to Donald.

"Well?"

"I came to tell you that you're cutting on my land."

"What do you mean?" The tone was most insolent.

"Just what I say. You've been cutting on my land."

"Nothing of the sort, but I'm much obliged to you for coming way down here to tell me," Duke sneered.

"If you'll come out there with me I'll show you where the line is."

"No need. I know very well where it is."

"And do you mean to tell me that you haven't cut over the line?"

"Sure I've cut over it and what's more I'm going to keep right on."

"But—"

"There's no buts about it. The fact of the matter is you don't own a foot of that land."

"So that's your game, is it?" Donald laughed. "Perhaps you can tell me who does own it."

"Sure I can. That tract next to ours belongs to Ben Sloyd."

For a moment Donald was too surprised to speak, then he asked:

"Since when?"

"I don't know that," Duke said with a shrug of his shoulders. "All I know is that Ben was

up here about a week ago and told me that the land belonged to him and that he had made arrangements with the Northern Star to have it cut and that I was to go ahead on it."

"Did he tell you how he came into possession of it?"

"Oh, I believe he said something about there being a flaw in the title and that your father never really owned it. I wasn't particularly interested and didn't pay much attention to that part of it."

"Why wasn't I notified?"

"Oh, I guess Ben thought that the more you cut the less he'd have to cut. You see he can claim all you've got down."

"It's all a lie and—" Donald began hotly but Duke interrupted him:

"Don't get gay now or you may be sorry."

Donald was about to reply when Jimmie spoke:

"I don't know much about this business Mr. Duke but whether it's so or not, you've acted like a cad."

"You'd better keep your opinion to yourself, Shinn," Duke snarled as he got to his feet. "This is no affair of yours and I advise you to keep out of it."

"Anything that concerns Don's business up

here is my affair," Jimmie replied hotly. "At least I choose to make it so."

Tiny Tim had taken no part in the conversation but as Duke rose to his feet he also got out of his chair. Donald, knowing that the two men were in an ugly humor and would like nothing better than to pick a fight in which they would have all the advantage, seized his friend by the arm.

"We might as well be going, Jimmie," he said moving toward the door.

"I think you'd better," Duke sneered. "Go while the going's good."

"Do you think he was lying, Don?" Jimmie asked as soon as they had put on their snowshoes and started back.

"I think he was telling what's not so when he said that the land doesn't belong to me but I guess he was telling the truth when he said that Ben Sloyd told him that it didn't. I knew Sloyd was up to something but I never suspected this."

"But do you think it can be true?"

"Frankly I do not. Father was too good a business man to overlook a thing like that."

"But what are you going to do?"

"I'll have to go down to Skowhegan in the morning and see about it. In the meantime

don't say a word to any of the men. Of course we'll tell Mike but no one else."

Mike was in the office when they returned and Donald lost no time in telling him what had happened.

"Faith an' what de'j know aboot thot?" Mike's indignation was at blood heat when Donald had finished.

"I know it's a pretty serious thing for me if it turns out to be true," Donald said soberly.

"Thot Ben Sloyd is a slick one but I'll be jiggered if he kin get away with anything so raw as thot." And if looks would kill both boys were sure that Ben Sloyd would, as Jimmie put it, have at once needed the services of an undertaker.

Donald left the following morning, which was Wednesday, in time to catch Joe Betts on his trip down the lake. He returned Friday just before lunch time. There was no one at the camp except Tony and Splinters and they were about to start off with the noon-day lunch for the crew. Donald decided to go along with them and eat his lunch with the rest of the men.

He tried to assume a cheerful look as he shook hands with Mike and Jimmie but he did not succeed in deceiving either of them.

"No, I didn't have a very successful trip al-

though it might be worse," he told them as the three sat down on a log a short distance from the others. "It's this way," he explained. "I went to see Mr. Stone, who used to do all of father's law business, and told him all about it. Well he went to see Sloyd and learned that he has a deed to the tract which was executed about a week before father's deed. Unfortunately for me the man who sold the land is dead. Of course Sloyd has a forged deed or else the man who sold the land was a rascal and sold it twice."

"I don't see how he'd dare to do that," Jimmie declared.

"Nor I," Donald agreed. "As Mr. Stone pointed out, the one weak place in Sloyd's defense, or rather claim, for I seem to be on the defensive, is that his deed was never recorded."

"Then it's no good, is it?" Jimmie asked.

"That doesn't make any difference so far as the legality of the deed is concerned, but Sloyd may find it hard to explain why he never had it recorded. You see it kind of looks as though it might have been a put up job between the man who sold the land and him."

"And what are you going to do?" Jimmie asked.

"I'm going right ahead as if nothing had hap-

pened. Of course it will be a thing for the court to decide when Sloyd puts in his claim for the land and the lumber we've cut. Mr. Stone seems to think that the fact that he has let me go ahead and cut without saying anything about it will count heavily against him.

"I'll bet it will," Jimmie said and Mike nodded his head in assent.

"You see," Donald explained, "while Sloyd is mighty shrewd in some ways he is really a very ignorant man and I don't suppose it ever occurred to him that he had made a slip."

"Then you think it will come out all right?" Jimmie asked.

"I wouldn't say that," Donald replied shaking his head. "Sloyd's got lots of money and you know what that means but Mr. Stone's a good man and a smart lawyer and I'm going to take a chance and go ahead."

"Atta bye," Mike declared slapping Donald on the back. "Faith an' we'll be after makin' thot owld scamp look like a plugged thirty cent piece afore we're through with him, so we will."

"You said a mouthful," Jimmie laughed and even Donald was forced to smile.

"But we must be mighty careful that none of the crew finds out anything about it," he cautioned. "They'll get the idea that they're not

going to get the bonus and it may make a difference in their work if nothing else. Of course," he added, "Duke or Tiny may make it their business to tell them but that's a chance we've got to take."

CHAPTER X

DONALD TURNS DOWN AN OFFER

The next morning Donald was hard at work scaling when he saw Ben Sloyd coming toward him.

"Good morning, Donald."

"Good morning, Mr. Sloyd," Donald returned pleasantly.

For several minutes there was silence as Donald continued his work. Then clearing his throat, Sloyd said:

"You know, Donald, I've always took an interest in ye. I made ye an offer for this tract some time ago an' I've been thinkin' lately that perhaps I didn't bid quite enough."

"I'll say you didn't," Donald smiled.

"Mebby not. But I'm goin' to make a good enough offer now."

"But Mr. Sloyd, I thought you claimed you owned the land already."

Sloyd again cleared his throat before replying and Donald could see that he was squirming, as he afterward told Jimmie and Mike.

"And I thought I did but it seems that there's a kind of a hitch in the deed. Not that I've give up the claim but I don't want to be hard on ye, and I'd rather buy than press the suit which might come out my way an' I'll grant ye, might not."

This was good news to Donald who knew that the man would never have made the concession had he the slightest claim on the property. It was quite evident to him that Sloyd's scheme had failed totally.

"How much are you willing to bid?" he asked, not that he had the least intention of selling but he was anxious to learn just how far the man was willing to go.

"How much'll you take?"

"I'm not prepared to set a price," Donald replied quickly. "As I told you before the land is not for sale but, of course, a sufficiently good offer might tempt me."

"Well, I'll take over your contract with the Northern Star, an' give ye $40,000 cash."

"Nothing doing," Donald replied promptly.

"But that's more'n it's worth."

"That's a matter of opinion. It's worth more than that to me."

"How about $45,000?"

"Not enough."

"You're a fool," the man cried and Donald could see that he was getting angry.

"That may be, but remember, this is my land and I don't have to sell it unless I want to."

"But you'll wish you had."

"You've said that several times before," Donald reminded him. "But to bring the matter to a head, I've decided what I'll take."

"How much?" Sloyd asked eagerly.

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"You're crazy."

"Maybe so," Donald laughed. "But that's my price. Take it or leave it."

"I'll give you $50,000."

"I positively will not sell for $99,999.99," Donald said sternly. "And that's my last word on the subject."

"You'll be sorry before long," Sloyd snarled. "But I want you to remember that I offered $50,000."

"I'll remember it," Donald assured him.

Without another word the man started off down the lake toward the other camp walking on the crust which was still strong.

"The nigger in the wood pile must have been a pretty good sized one," Donald chuckled as he watched him.

It was part of Splinter's work to meet the

truck on its first trip up the lake in the morning and get the mail. When Donald went for lunch shortly after, he found a letter from the lawyer which explained Sloyd's visit.

"Dear Don," the letter began, "I hardly think you need worry any more about Sloyd's deed. It is a rank forgery and I did not have very much trouble in proving it. Of course I could have had him arrested but I hardly thought you would want to go that far as it would make a big sensation and he is getting to be old and somewhat childish. So I told him that, so far as I was concerned, I would drop it provided he would go up there and make you an offer of $50,000 for the land. I knew that would punish him almost as much as sending him to jail. Of course if you want him arrested it is not too late but I hardly think you will, knowing you as I do. Of course he deserves it but mercy is often better than vengeance."

"It was quite a nigger for a fact," he grinned as he finished reading the letter which closed with several bits of news and best wishes for his success.

It was with a light heart that he returned to his work after eating lunch. He had worried considerable regarding the matter of the deed and it was a great relief to have it off his mind.

Still he was well aware that he was by no means out of the woods as yet. True he was far ahead of his schedule so far as cutting down trees was concerned but, even with that finished there would remain the task of getting them to market, not a small undertaking. Would Sloyd and Duke be able to put any more pitfalls in his way? That was the question he asked himself over and over again.

"Oh, well, we'll worry about them as they come," he thought as he reached the log pile.

The first of March came and with it the announcement from Donald that the number of feet contracted for had been cut and piled on the shore ready for the breaking up of the lake.

"But we're going to keep right on cutting," he added. "The Northern Star agreed to handle all I'd get out on the same terms and the more the merrier."

He had neither seen nor received any communication from Sloyd or Duke since the visit of the former and he had almost began to hope that they had decided to let him alone.

"They haven't though," he confided to Jimmie one evening as they were sitting before the stove in the office. "They're not that kind and I know as well as that I'm here that they've got something up their sleeves."

"But what can they do now that you've got enough logs to fill your contract?" Jimmie asked.

"It's hard to say but I guess there's plenty they could do. Remember those logs are a good many miles from where they've got to be delivered before the conditions of the contract are met."

"Then you think you're still in the woods?"

"I know I am," Donald replied decisively.

As if in confirmation of his avowal a knock came on the door and almost before he had time to bid the knocker come in it opened and Frank Duke entered closely followed by Tiny Tim.

"Good evening," the former greeted them as he pulled off his heavy mittens and held out his hands to the warmth of the stove.

"Good evening," both boys returned his salutation pleasantly enough.

"How's tricks?"

"Can't complain," Jimmie replied with a glance toward Donald.

"Won't you sit down?" Donald invited nodding toward a couple of chairs.

"Thanks."

For a moment no one spoke and the situation was becoming a bit strained when Duke said:

"Price, I've come up to have a little talk with

you about that contract you have with the Northern Star."

"Yes?"

"Fact of the matter is," Duke went on, "Old Sloyd is raising the dickens because you wouldn't sell out to him."

"That's funny," Donald said.

"Why's it funny? You know how determined he is to get a thing once he sets out to do it."

"It's not that. You see I happen to know that he made me the offer under, well, under pressure you might say."

"I know nothing about that," Duke affirmed. "All I know is that he has authorized me to offer you five thousand dollars above his last bid."

"That would be $55,000."

"Exactly."

"I told him that my price was $100,000 and not a cent less."

"But you know that's absurd."

"Perhaps, but it's a fact nevertheless."

"I think I can prove to you that it isn't."

"I'm from Missouri," Donald smiled.

"All right. Now listen. Suppose I can convince you that it will be impossible for you to get those logs to Waterville in time to make

good on your contract. How would you feel about it then?"

"It would lower my price very materially," Donald confessed. "But it would take pretty clear proof. You've failed so far, you know and I have a certain bottle in the background so to speak."

"I'm not worrying about that bottle," Duke blustered.

"That's all right. You ought to know whether it's worth worrying about or not. And if not, why worry?"

"Exactly. And now for the proof. You can't get those logs down in time for the simple reason that we've engaged every one of the boats of the Coburn Company until the first of July. Now how about your price?" And Duke leaned back in his chair as if the matter was settled beyond question.

"Hasn't gone down a bit," Donald smiled.

"What do you mean? You said if I could prove it your price would tumble."

"Exactly, but you haven't done it, not yet."

"Why haven't I?"

"For the simple reason that you are not telling the truth.

"You mean to say I lie?" Duke started up from his chair.

"I reckon it amounts to about that."

"I'll—"

"No you won't," Donald asserted sternly. "Remember that a shout will bring twenty men here in a minute. But there's no need of anything of that kind. You made an assertion and I denied it."

"But—"

"And I know that I'm right because I have a written contract in the bank in Skowhegan guaranteeing me the use of the *Mooosehead* and the *Katadin* to tow all my logs across as soon as the ice breaks up. So you can easily see that your bluff has failed."

Duke's chagrin was very evident and for a moment he seemed at a loss for a way in which he could defend his statement.

"The way in which things come out will tell who's bluffing," he growled as he got from his chair and started for the door.

"So be it," Donald flung after him, "but don't forget a certain small bottle in case you feel inclined to force the issue."

For an instant Duke hesitated on the threshold of the room as if inclined to come back but his companion, who had preceded him, was already some feet distant, and he evidently

thought better of it for he soon went out slamming the door behind him.

"Pleasant guy, that," Jimmie laughed.

"Isn't he?"

"He looked as though it would have been a pleasure to bite a tenpenny nail in two when you called his bluff."

"It's mighty strange to me though," Donald said a moment later, "why Ben Sloyd is so anxious to get hold of this piece of land. Of course that letter explained why he offered the $50,000 but it doesn't tell why he's willing to tack on $5,000 more. Of course I know how anxious he always has been to pick up something for less than it's worth but between you and me and the fence post $55,000 is a mighty good price for the property. That is I thought it was but now I don't know what to think. I'm up a tree."

"Well, that's better than being in a hole," Jimmie laughed.

"I know, but sometimes the hole looks up pretty big," Donald declared seriously. "Lumbering is a mighty uncertain business when you're pinned down to the kind of a contract I've got, there's so many things can happen to hold up things."

"Well, 'never trouble trouble till trouble

troubles you,' is my motto," Jimmie declared. Then coming around back of Donald's chair he placed a hand affectionately on his shoulder saying, "I'm going to see you through this, old fellow, and if we can't put it over we'll at least give 'em a mighty good run for their money."

"Righto," Donald sprang from his chair and grabbed his chum in a tight hug. "You're the best ever, Jimmie," he cried.

"Gee, but I'll bet a bear hasn't got much on you when it comes to hugging," Jimmie gasped as he wiggled loose. "You want to be mighty careful if you ever fall in love. No girl could stand very much of that sort of show of affection."

"That's a long way off," Donald laughed as he threw a junk of wood into the stove.

It was one afternoon toward the last of March that the next move on the part of the enemy came. Donald had finished his work of scaling for the day and had returned to the office to record the figures in his log book which he kept in a little home-made desk. But to his great surprise the book was not there. Thinking that he had mislaid it he made a hurried search of the room but failed to find it. He was not really worried although he knew its value to him, thinking that probably Mike had taken

it for some purpose. But when an hour later the foreman disclaimed all knowledge of it he became really anxious. The book contained a complete record of the winter's work and was the only check he possessed on the amount of lumber cut. If it were lost he would have to depend wholly on the figures of the Northern Star when the lumber was delivered and, under the circumstances he was very loath to do this. Not that he doubted the honesty of the company as such but he knew of at least one individual connected with it who would not hesitate to stoop to any means to injure him.

"That book never walked out of here alone," he said to Jimmie and Mike.

"Faith an' it's right ye are," Mike agreed scratching his head.

"And I don't think there's much doubt about who took it," Jimmie added. "Would it be of any benefit to that fellow Duke and will its loss hurt you any?" he asked.

"The answer would be no to both questions if he was honest," Donald replied slowly. "But, on the other hand, if he's dishonest the answer is yes." And he explained the value of the book pointing out what use an unscrupulous person could make of it.

"Then it's yes all right," Jimmie declared.

"But when could he have taken it?"

"Last night of course."

"But there's a lock on the door now," Donald pointed out.

"But how about this window?" Jimmie asked resting his hand on the sill.

"By jove, but I believe it has been forced," Donald declared examining the catch.

"Of course it has. Those screws were forced out and then screwed back. See how loose they are."

"Faith an' it's correct ye are," Mike declared after he too had taken a look.

For a moment no one spoke. Then Jimmie said:

"Do you know I've always thought I'd make a fine burglar and here's a good chance to prove it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm going to get that book back if it's a possible thing."

"But how?"

"Why by going and burglarizing that camp just down the lake, of course. You don't think there's any doubt but that it's there do you?"

"No," Donald replied slowly. "But it's risky."

"Of course it is and that's where all the fun is."

"What time do we start?" Donald asked after a moment's thought.

"Where do you get that we stuff?"

"Of course I'm going with you."

"Of course you're not. This is a case where two's one too many. Make too much noise, you know."

Donald smiled. "Good old Jimmie, but it won't go. We'll go together and what's more we'll get it if it's getable."

"That's the talk," Jimmie cried. "We'll get it, but honestly, Don, I think you'd better let me go alone."

"Think all you want to but that's all it'll amount to so let's say no more about it. I'm the one to go alone if anybody but I don't agree with you that two'll be too many."

"All right. Have your own way, that is so far as the too many's concerned, but I wouldn't miss this chance to test my qualities as a burglar for a farm."

It was shortly after twelve o'clock when the two boys started. There was no need of snowshoes as the snow, dampened by the warm sun in the middle of the day, had now frozen to a strong crust. The new moon had set earlier in the evening leaving the night so dark that they could barely see each other a few feet apart.

In spite of his assurance of a few hours before Donald was by no means confident of their ability to recover the lost book.

"He's not going to leave it lying around where we can spot it," he told Jimmie as they hastened along.

"I suppose not and that's where the expert burglary'll come in. Remember, Don, to be a good burglar one must have two qualities. First he must be able to locate the thing he's going to burgle and second he must be able to make a good get-away."

"Especially the latter," Donald laughed.

"But without the other he might as well not have tried."

"That's true too. Let's hope we'll qualify in both respects to-night."

"If no one sleeps in the office and if he's left the book there it ought not to be very difficult."

"And if the opposite's the case it's apt to be mighty difficult."

"Well, that's a matter which is beyond our control so we'll worry about it when we have to," Jimmie declared.

There was no light to be seen either in the office or the bunk-house when they reached the end of their trip. Not a sound save the slight rustle of the boughs, as they swayed above their

heads in the light breeze, came to their ears as they crouched behind a big spruce scarcely a dozen feet from the office.

"Guess everyone's asleep all right," Jimmie whispered.

"Looks like it."

"Then let's go."

It had been decided that Donald should remain on the watch outside while Jimmie searched the office.

Twenty minutes had passed and Donald was about to push open the door and speak to Jimmie when the latter came out.

"Nothing doing," he whispered.

"I was afraid not," Donald replied.

"I've searched every square inch in the place and it's not there unless they've hidden it under the flooring or something of that sort.

They had started on the return trip and had taken but a few steps when Donald stopped and grabbed Jimmie by the arm.

"Listen," he whispered.

A faint but unmistakable sound came to their ears.

"Something's burning," Jimmie declared.

"And it's over toward the bunk-house. Let's go round back and see what it is," Donald proposed. "Great Scott!" he cried a moment later

as they reached the back of the log building, "the kitchen is all afire."

Jimmie started forward but Donald pulled him back.

"Just a second," he cautioned, "we've got to wake them up of course but we mustn't be seen because they'll swear that we set the place on fire if they catch us."

"But how—"

"I'll show you."

Donald quickly grabbed a stick of wood from the pile close at hand and motioned for Jimmie to follow him. Running around the side of the cabin, he stopped a few feet from one of the small windows, and taking careful aim, hurled the stick through it. There was a loud crash of breaking glass followed by a moment of silence. Then a loud shout of fire followed by other cries announced the success of his action.

"Come on now, let's get behind one of those trees. They're awake all right."

They had hardly concealed themselves behind a convenient tree when the men began pouring out of the building, most of them but half clad. But they were not the kind who easily lose their heads at a time when they need their wits and in almost no time they were at the back of the

house fighting the flames which were now threatening to burst from the windows.

"I wonder if they'll be able to save the building," Donald whispered.

As he received no reply he glanced back but to his great surprise Jimmie was not there.

"Jimmie!"

No reply.

"Jimmie!" A little louder this time, but still no reply came to him.

"Now I wonder—" he began then stopped as a sudden thought struck him. "He's just big enough idiot to try it," he told himself as he started on a run for the front of the building. "I thought so," he muttered as, through the open door, he caught sight of flashes of light darting about the room.

But he had only a moment to wait before Jimmie came running out.

"Come on. Beat it. I've got it," he cried as he saw who it was.

They turned and were about to start when, in the dim light, Donald saw some one almost upon them. He grabbed Jimmie by the arm and pulled him toward the farther corner hoping to escape notice. But the man had already seen them and rushed forward ordering them to stop.

"We must run for it," Donald said, and took the lead with Jimmie close at his heels.

As the man who had seen them was between them and their camp they were obliged to make a wide circuit around the office building before they could head for home. They were both fast runners and it was only a minute until they had made the turn. Had their pursuer dodged around the other way he would undoubtedly have caught one or both of them but Donald had figured that, in the excitement, he would not think of it and events proved that he was correct. Still he was also a fast runner and was only a few feet behind as they dodged past the last corner of the office.

"Shake a leg," Donald shouted as he increased his own pace.

He was afraid, after they reached the edge of the clearing and had plunged into the thick forest, to put on full speed for fear of running into a tree as the darkness was so intense that he could see but a very short distance ahead. He could tell that Jimmie was keeping close to his heels although their soft moccasins made but little sound on the frozen snow.

Whether or not their pursuer had followed them beyond the clearing he had no way of telling and he did not yet dare to stop to listen.

On he ran until he judged that they had covered at least a quarter of the distance back to camp, then, turning his head slightly, he asked:

"Hear anything of him?"

"No, but con—"

Donald did not hear the rest of Jimmie's answer for at that instant he ran plump into a tree and, for an instant, a million stars seemed to dance before his eyes.

"Are you hurt?" Jimmie asked anxiously.

"I—I guess not," he stammered. "But that was some bump. But listen."

"I don't hear a thing, do you?" Jimmie asserted after a moment's pause.

"No, I guess he gave it up."

"Then I guess we'd better go back."

"Go back! What for?"

"I was telling you when you hit the tree. I've dropped that book."

"Dropped it!"

"Yes. Oh, I know I'm the original clumsy Claud and all that but—"

"None of that, now," Donald interrupted. "But do you know when you dropped it?"

"It was soon after we got into the woods. You see I had it under my coat and it slipped out some way and I didn't dare to stop for it."

"Of course not. He'd have had you and the book too if you had. But we'll find it."

"If the other fellow didn't," Jimmie added gloomily.

"Not one chance in a thousand that he'd see it in the darkness."

As rapidly as they dared they made their way back and a few minutes later they were again at the edge of the clearing.

"Guess they're going to save the house after all," Jimmie whispered as he looked toward the rear of the cabin.

Although smoke was still pouring from the windows, as they could tell by the odor, the wind blowing it their way, they could see no sign of flames. They could tell by the sounds that the men were still at work and Jimmie suggested that it would be a good plan to wait until they were in bed again before beginning the hunt for the book.

"They're apt to see the light if we use the flash now," he declared.

"You're right there, but we can hunt without the flash," Donald suggested.

"Can you remember just where we went?"

"Pretty near, I reckon. Come over this way. There it was right about here unless I'm mistaken."

Side by side they moved slowly forward, bending over until their eyes were as near the snow as they were able to get them and keep on their feet.

"It ought to show up pretty plain on the white snow," Jimmie whispered.

They had proceeded in this way for a considerable distance when Jimmie said:

"I'm sure I dropped it before we came this far."

"Then we must have missed it."

"Unless that other fellow picked it up."

"Well, let's work our way back and hope for better luck."

But they reached the edge of the clearing again with no sight of the book.

"I'm going to use the flash this time and risk it," Donald declared as he turned back again.

Both the boys had flashlights and this time they separated for a distance of about fifteen feet and walked slowly back flashing the lights to either side as they went. They had covered but a short distance, however, when suddenly the sharp bark of a revolver sounded from over toward their right and a bullet buried itself in the trunk of a tree only a foot from Donald's head.

"I was afraid of it," he cried in a low voice. "Beat it and never mind the book."

But now luck was with them for just as he had started to run his eye caught sight of a black object close to the foot of a tree. With a low cry of joy he stooped and picked up the lost book.

"I've got it," he called to Jimmie who was some ten yards ahead.

Bang! Another bullet whistled over his head and with a thud struck a tree a few feet to his left.

"A little too close for comfort," he muttered as he ran bending as low as he dared.

"Stop, or I'll shoot again."

It was Duke's voice and only a short distance behind. But they paid no attention, keeping on as rapidly as they dared. Almost immediately another shot rang out followed by several more but the bullets went wild.

By this time Donald had nearly caught up with Jimmie and soon the two were running side by side.

"Don't run into a tree," Jimmie panted.

There were no more shots and Donald doubted if they were being followed, but thinking it best to take no chances, kept up the pace until they reached the edge of his clearing. Then

he stopped and listened. There was no sound of pursuit.

"I don't believe he chased us into the woods at all," he said.

"Neither do I. But did you say that you found the book?" Jimmie asked.

"I sure did."

"Good for you. We weren't skunked after all."

"I'll say we weren't."

"But do you suppose we'll get into any trouble over that fire?"

"I hardly think so. I don't believe anybody could swear to our identity in the darkness. Of course Duke'll know well enough who it was but he can't prove it."

CHAPTER XI

THE BREAKUP

March slipped by with good weather for the most of the time and April came almost before they realized it. As the sun mounted higher the days grew warmer although at night the mercury continued to go well below freezing giving a good road for several hours each morning. As the men were now cutting near the lake the three teams had no trouble in keeping up their end of the work. But toward the last of the month the freezing ceased and Donald was obliged to call it a job as he put it. The horses were sent to Greenville where he had arranged for their keeping through the summer in case he decided not to sell them.

There was still a lot of snow in the woods and travel of any kind was almost out of the question. But it was settling rapidly as the warm sun got in its work.

Donald and Mike had decided that it would be wise to keep the men even though they were obliged to be practically idle, that they might

have plenty of help in getting the logs in the water as soon as the ice went out.

"A few dollars wasted now'll mebby mane a lot more saved later on," the Irishman declared.

He knew how important it was that there should be no delay in getting the logs started down the river when so much depended on getting them to their destination at a certain time.

"Faith an' if this weather kapes up it'll not be many days thot ye'll have ter pay 'em for nothin,' " he assured him.

Mike was right for it was only a week later that a loud booming sound from the lake awoke Jimmie from a deep sleep a little after twelve o'clock at night.

"What's that?" he asked leaning over the edge of his bunk.

"It's the ice breaking up," Donald, who slept in the bunk beneath him, replied.

"Is that all?" Jimmie was evidently much relieved. "I was dreaming that I was in a big battle with the Germans and was making an attack all by my lonesome on a big battery when all at once they began to fire. Gee, but I thought it was all up with little Jimmie," and he sank back in his bunk with a deep sigh of relief.

Breakfast was over before daylight the next

morning and the first peep of dawn saw the entire crew hard at work, some rolling the logs into the lake while others were busy constructing the long booms which were to surround the rafts of logs while they were being towed across the lake.

"Will the boats be up to-day?" Jimmie asked.

"They ought to be up before dark if they have no trouble with them. That was in my contract, but of course there may be some unavoidable delay but I hope not. You see Duke will do his best to beat me across with a raft. It's a matter of first come first served when it comes to the right of way in sluicing them over the dam."

It was just four o'clock when the first raft consisting of some 30,000 logs was ready. The logs were held together by a long boom which completely surrounded them. The boom was made by fastening logs together end to end. To do this a hole was bored in the end of each log about six inches deep and perhaps a foot from the end. Into these holes wooden pins were driven to which short pieces of rope were fastened.

"There comes a boat," Jimmie shouted pointing down the lake just as Mike announced that the raft was done.

"Good," Donald returned then turning to the boy who was standing by his side, he said:

"Splinters, run up and tell Tony to put up lunch enough for a dozen men and make it snappy."

"You won't start till morning, will you?" Jimmie asked.

"You bet we will," Donald replied. "That raft'll be in motion in less than a half hour after the boat gets here."

"I can see three more now," Jimmie announced.

"That's two for us and two for Duke. He must have chartered the *Comet* and the *Twilight.*"

"Which are the fastest?"

"Well, now you're asking something," Donald smiled. "When they're running free I guess the two that he's got are but the *Moosehead* and the *Katadin* are better pullers, or they used to be. But our best bet is that Duke isn't ready to start yet. If we can get a few hours lead on him we'll be all right."

It was about an hour later when the two boats, the *Moosehead* and the *Katadin,* rang to reverse just out in front of the camp and slid slowly forward until they were alongside the big raft. Donald was waiting out on the boom

and, as soon as the boat touched, sprang aboard.

"On time as usual, Cap'n Seth," he greeted the captain of the *Moosehead*, a man about sixty years old who had spent nearly all his life on the lake in the employ of the Coburn Steamboat Company.

"And I see that you're ready for us, Don," Captain Seth smiled as he held out his hand.

"Sure and the quicker we get started the sooner," Donald laughed. "It means a whole lot to me to get across ahead of the other fellow."

"Then I reckon ye want both boats to hitch on, eh?"

"You said it."

"An' I reckon we need 'em. It's going to blow some to-night an' o' course it'll be dead agin us."

"Well, that can't be helped, but it'll be against the other fellow just as bad."

Donald had arranged with his foreman that he and Jimmie together with six of the men were to go across with the raft and go down the river with the logs. Mike was to stay with the rest of the crew until the last raft had been built and started across the lake. Then the men were to be paid off and dismissed while he would join them somewhere down the river. He

had chosen six of the best of the crew for, although there were camps of from ten to twenty men each at intervals of about ten miles along the river whose business it was to see that all logs got past their station, he knew that it would help a lot to have his own men on the job all the time. Jacques Bolduc and Baptist were among the six he had picked.

It took but a short time to get ready for the start. A three inch hawser was passed around one of the boom logs and after paying out about fifty feet was made fast to the snubbing post at the stern of the *Moosehead.* Then as soon as the *Katadin* had hooked on to the bow of her sister boat they were ready for the signal.

"Just a minute," Donald shouted to Captain Seth who was in the wheel-house, "here comes Splinters with the grub. We don't want to leave that behind."

"Let her go now," he shouted a moment later as he took the large basket from Splinters.

Two bells sounded down in the engine room and the hawser tightened as the propeller beat the water. It seemed a long time to Jimmie, who, with Donald, was standing in the stern of the *Moosehead,* before much impression was made on the big raft. But slowly the boats

forged ahead and the raft began to assume the shape of a flat-iron.

"How fast can they tow a raft like that?" Jimmie asked.

"All depends on the wind. In a calm we ought to make pretty near two miles an hour with the two boats but with this wind against us we'll do well to make one. Often it's all the boats can do to hold their own with a big raft and I've seen the time more than once, when it blew so hard that in spite of all we could do we were swept backward two or three miles an hour."

A strong wind had been blowing from across the lake the greater part of the day and now, instead of going down with the sun as is usually the case, it was gradually increasing in strength, while a dark bank of clouds in the west gave promise of a bad night.

"Hurrah, we're really off," Jimmie shouted as he saw the raft pull slowly away from the shore.

Although Duke's camp was but a short distance down the lake, a point of land jutting out hid it from view so they were unable to tell whether or not they had secured a lead on him.

"My, but this speed almost takes my breath away," Jimmie laughed a few minutes later. "I believe we're making almost a foot a minute."

"Hardly that, I reckon," Donald said.

"How far is it to the dam?"

"About fourteen miles."

"Then if we have good luck we may get there sometime to-morrow?"

"Can't tell a thing about it. It all depends on the wind."

It was nearly a half hour later and they were out far enough so that they could see the shore beyond the point. It was now nearly dark but they could still see the other two boats.

"He's started," Jimmie cried.

"Just about, I should say."

"Well, we have a little lead on him anyhow."

"Little is right. But it's better than nothing."

"Think they can pass us?"

"All depends on how large a raft they have. I wish it was light enough to see. If they have a small one, as I think likely, they'll go past us as though we were hitched."

As they got out into the lake the wind did not seem to be any stronger, in fact Donald thought it had died down a bit.

"Just so it doesn't blow hard enough to break up the raft I don't know's it makes much difference," he told Jimmie.

"Do you mean that it can blow hard enough to break that raft?"

"I'll say it can."

"Then what do you do?"

"Just have to let them go and scour around later and pick 'em up."

"Whew! That must take some time."

"Anywhere from a week to ten days. Depends on where they blow to. Sometimes they stay fairly well together and then again they'll scatter over half the lake."

"And does that happen often?"

"No, thank goodness. I've only seen it once."

"Think he's gaining on us?" Jimmie asked a little later.

"I think so, but it's pretty hard to tell now that all you can see are the lights."

"How about some eats?"

"You said it. Come on."

They went into the little cabin where Donald had taken the grub basket and, after Jimmie had rounded up the crew from different parts of the boat, they were not long in getting under way with Tony's lunch, as Jimmie put it.

"She goin' be one bum night," Jacques declared as soon as he had taken his first bite.

"Oui," Baptist agreed and the others nodded their heads.

"You mean it's going to rain?" Jimmie asked.

"Oui, she rain an' wind blow ver' hard pretty queek," Baptist told him.

"It's raining now," Donald declared pressing his face against the little window.

"Well, we'll have to do as they do in Spain, I reckon," Jimmie said.

"What dat dey do in Spain?" Jacques asked.

"Why, they let it rain."

"Dat one bon joke, oui," Baptist laughed, "but me, me do lik' dey do in Dover."

Jimmie scratched his head. "All right, I'll bite. What do they do in Dover?"

"Dey wait till she be over."

"You win, Baptist," Donald laughed hitting the big man on the back.

"Oui, me too mooch for leetle boy," Baptist grinned.

Stepping outside the door of the cabin Donald found that the rain was coming down in earnest so he returned and, lifting up the cover of one of the seats which ran around the cabin, pulled out a couple of oil skin coats.

"Get into one of these, Jimmie, and we'll take a turn outside," he said.

"Gee, but it's dark," Jimmie declared a moment later as they groped their way toward the stern.

"Kinder mucky for a fact."

"I hope that captain of yours knows where he's heading for."

"Don't you fret about Cap'n Seth. He could steer a boat all over the lake with his eyes shut."

Of course they could see nothing of the other boat except a light or two and Donald was not sure as to whether or not the *Comet* and *Twilight* had gained on them while they had been inside.

"It's mighty hard to tell much about distance under these circumstances," he said as he strained his eyes trying to make out the outline of the boat. "But I should say that they're nearer than they were when we went in."

Just then Captain Seth joined them.

"Think they're gaining, Cap'n?" Donald asked.

"Sure they are. They've got a smaller raft than we have or we could run rings around them in this wind," Captain Seth replied.

"How fast are we going?" Jimmie asked.

"Wall, I guess we won't be arrested fer exceedin' no speed limit. I reckon we've made about a half mile in the last hour. But if this 'ere wind gets much stronger we'll have hard work ter hold our own."

"I suppose you've got on all the steam she'll carry."

"You're a hootin' I have. Just take a peep in the engine room if you don't believe me."

"I'll take your word for it," Donald laughed.

For nearly an hour the two boys stood in the stern hardly taking their eyes from the lights behind. The wind gave no indication of abating, indeed it seemed to be increasing if anything. Captain Seth had returned to the wheelhouse and the men were all gathered in the cabin where it was warm and dry.

"I guess we're foolish to stay out here in the wet," Donald declared.

"Just what I was thinking. I move we go inside."

They were about to move on the motion when Captain Seth again joined them.

"They're goin' ter pass us," he announced.

"Think so?" Jimmie asked.

"Sure. They're moving and we hain't."

"What do you mean, we're not moving? Did we hit a rock?"

"Narry a rock, but the wind's blowin' us back as fast as the engine can push us ahead."

"Why not throw out the anchor and save coal?" Jimmie asked.

"No anchor would hold in this wind," Donald told him.

It was very plain to the boys that the boats

in the rear were overhauling them, now that they were barely holding their own.

"Does it mean that we lose the race?" Jimmie asked.

"I suppose it does," Donald told him and it was impossible for him to keep the disappointment entirely out of his voice. "But it doesn't mean that we've lost out on the contract," he said more hopefully.

And still the wind increased in strength, blowing steadily from the north-east. The boats were being pushed to their utmost in the effort to at least keep from drifting back.

"We must be drifting," Donald declared a few moments later. "It's blowing harder than it was when Cap'n Seth said we were only holding our own."

"Is there any danger?" Jimmie asked.

"To us or to the raft?"

"I mean to the raft."

"Not unless it blows a good deal harder than it is now. That raft's put together right and will stand most anything short of a cyclone. Of course if we keep on drifting long enough we'll bring up against the shore and then it'll take some time in the morning to get started again as some of the logs will be pushed up on to the

shore unless we happen to hit a place where there's no beach."

"Then I guess we might as well go in, eh?"

"Just a minute. I don't quite see what they're trying to do."

"How come?"

"Why, if the *Comet* doesn't sheer off pretty quick she's going to hit the rear of our raft."

"He's getting pretty close for a fact."

"There, he's turning now," Donald said a moment later. "But, upon my word, I'm afraid he's waited too long."

The captain of the *Comet* had indeed waited too long for, before he was able to get clear, they heard a bump as her bow struck their raft.

"I thought so," Donald said quietly.

"Can't he back out?"

"Not in this gale he can't."

At that moment Captain Seth returned.

"The dum idjet," he snorted. "That's young Bill Comey runnin' the *Comet* an' what he don't know 'bout navigatin' a boat'd make a pleggy sight bigger book nor what he does know would."

"What can he do now?" Donald asked.

"Can't do nothin' 'cept keep a pushin' an' goodness knows if he'll have sense enough to do that. Most o' these young sprouts now days

think as how they know it all an' ye can't tell 'em nothin'," with which sage remark Captain Seth shook his head and went forward toward the wheel-house.

"Evidently your friend the cap'n hasn't much use for young blood," Jimmie laughed.

"Well the old captains are rather jealous of the younger ones I guess. I suppose they're afraid they'll lose their positions so they never lose a chance to rub it in to them. But, bless you, there's not a kinder hearted man in the world than Cap'n Seth and his bark's a whole lot worse than his bite."

"This seems a good deal like a treadmill," Jimmie said after a few minutes of silence. "You keep a-going but you never get anywhere."

"We'd get somewhere all right if we didn't keep going, and we're likely to as it is," Donald replied soberly.

"It isn't going down any that's sure."

"How far do you think we are from the shore?"

"Can't be more than two or three miles."

"Then if we're drifting back we're apt to hit before many hours?"

"You bet we are."

Suddenly the unexpected happened. The hawser, which had been all the time as taut as

a bow string, went slack and the *Moosehead* seemed almost to leap ahead.

"What's happened?" Jimmie, who at the moment was looking forward, shouted.

There was no answer to his question and as he turned he was astonished to find that he was alone.

"Ho, Don!" he shouted.

No reply.

"Now where in the world did he get to so quick?" he muttered.

Hurriedly he began to search, his heart almost stopping with the thought that his friend might have fallen over board. He rushed to the cabin but a single glance told him that he was not there. Just as he started forward he bumped into some one and a glance told him that it was Captain Seth.

"Have you seen Don?" he shouted.

"No. Isn't he with you?"

"He was till a moment ago. I turned my head and when I looked around he was gone."

"Mebby he went to the engine room."

But he was not there and Jimmie's heart turned to lead.

"He must have fallen over," he gasped.

"God help him if he did," Captain Seth muttered.

What Jimmie feared had indeed happened. Just as he had turned his head Donald had leaned over the back of the boat and thrust his hand down into the water to see if he could get an idea as to how fast they were drifting, and at that instant the jerk came. Before he realized what had happened he was struggling in the icy water. As he had fallen only about a foot, the stern being only that far above the water, he hardly went below the surface. His first impulse was to swim for the steamer but a second thought convinced him that it would be useless as, freed from the raft, she would go ahead for some distance before stopping. No the only thing to do was to make for the raft. By this time he had succeeded in throwing off the heavy oilskin coat for he knew that it would be impossible to swin far with it flapping about his legs. How cold the water was. It seemed to penetrate to the very marrow of his bones and he knew that he must reach the raft soon if he was to get there at all. So, breathing a prayer for help, he struck out with all his strength. He had taken but a few strokes, however when he felt something brush against his leg. Instinctively he reached out his hand to grasp it and his heart gave a leap as he realized that it was the hawser. The rope was moving

through the water at a rapid pace and for a moment he had all he could do to cling on. But gradually, as his body took on the motion, it became less difficult and soon he began pulling himself forward hand over hand. Foot by foot he worked his way toward where he knew the boat must be and, after what seemed hours but was in reality but a few minutes, he could see the stern but a few feet ahead. Would he have strength enough left to pull himself up over the stern and if not could he make anyone on board hear? These were questions which he asked himself as inch by inch he crawled toward the boat. Almost as soon as he could touch it he realized that his strength was too far gone to be able to climb aboard by his own effort. So, clinging to the rope with both hands, he raised himself as far out of the water as he could and shouted at the top of his voice.

"Help! Help!"

Would no one hear him? Again and again he shouted, but he realized that his voice could carry but a short distance against that wind.

At the moment that Donald was calling for help Jimmie was standing by the wheel-house watching the captain as he started to bring the boat about.

"Hark!" he suddenly shouted.

"What is it?" Captain Seth asked leaning out the open door.

"I thought I heard a call for help. There it is again."

Not waiting another second he rushed for the stern.

"Help!"

There was no chance for mistake regarding the call this time and Jimmie's heart leaped as he realized that his friend was not lost.

"Where are you, Don?" he shouted as he reached the stern of the boat.

"Here."

The voice was weak and Jimmie lost no time in throwing himself on his stomach and leaning over the stern, and in another minute he had hold of Donald's collar.

"Easy now," he cautioned as he began to worm his way back.

Donald had strength enough left to help himself somewhat and in another minute he was dragged over the stern and was standing by Jimmie's side.

"Quick, now, into the engine room, or you'll freeze."

"Sure an' ut looks 'sif ye'd been in the drink." The speaker was the fireman of the *Moosehead*, an Irishman named Pat Murphy.

"I—I guess I have," Donald assured him his teeth chattering so that he could hardly speak.

"Peel off those wet clothes and give yourself a good rub down with a towel while I see what I can scare up for you to put on," Jimmie ordered.

He wrung what water he could out of the wet clothing and hung it up to dry close to the hot boiler, just as Captain Seth came into the room.

"Wall, I reckon you wasn't born ter be drowned," he said placing a hand on Donald's shoulder.

"Not this time anyhow," Donald smiled. "But what are you doing about the raft?"

"I've thrown out an anchor an' she's holdin' fair ter middlin'. Only thing we can do is ter wait till mornin'."

"I guess you're right. But did the rope break?"

"Break nothin'. Looks ter me's though the knot slipped."

"Wind's going down isn't it?" Jimmie asked.

"A few," the captain replied. "You boys better stretch out on the floor here and get some sleep."

He went out and after a little they decided to take his advice.

"Do you feel as though you'd caught cold?"

Jimmie asked anxiously as he spread a heavy blanket in front of the firebox.

"Not a bit. I'm feeling as fit as a fiddle," Donald assured him.

They were awake at the first peep of day and Donald found that his clothes were perfectly dry. As he was dressing Captain Seth came in.

"Pat's got some hot coffee in the cabin," he announced, "and the men are eating breakfast. Better get a hustle on afore it's all gone."

"Can you see anything of the raft?" Donald asked.

"Not yet, but it's pretty dark 'count o' the fog."

"No wonder he couldn't see it," Jimmie said as, a moment later, they stepped out of the engine room. "You could almost cut this fog with a knife."

Even after they had finished what remained of the food Tony had put up the fog showed no sign of lifting. Indeed it seemed thicker than ever as they groped their way forward to the wheel-house.

"What are we going to do?" Donald asked the captain who was leaning over the compass.

"Guess we might's well git the anchor up and poke along back. Don't know's we kin find

anything in this fog but we'll make a stab at it."

"I'm for that," Donald assured him.

"Now you two git out in the bow," the captain told them a few minutes later, "an' keep your eyes peeled." And he rang for slow speed ahead.

"Gee, but this gives you a funny sensation," Jimmie declared a little later. "I can see about three feet ahead and it seems as though we were going to hit something every minute."

"Well, we're not going fast enough to do much damage even if we do," Donald assured him.

A half hour passed and still the fog was as dense as ever. There was no wind and no sound broke the stillness save the faint rumble of the engine and the whistle which sent its shrill blast over the surface of the lake at intervals of a few seconds.

CHAPTER XII

DOWN THE RIVER

"Back up, quick!"

But Donald shouted the order too late for before the captain could even give the signal the bow struck the raft. However they were moving too slowly for any damage to result and Donald heaved a huge sigh of relief.

"Well, we found it all right," Captain Seth said as he stepped out of the wheel-house. "And now to see how that rope got away."

By this time the fog was slowly lifting and it was possible to see for a distance of several feet. With a deftness gained by long experience Pat, the fireman, who had joined them, leaped onto the raft and was soon lost to sight in the mist. But he was back again in less than fifteen minutes.

"Pin pulled out," he reported.

"Jest as I expected," the captain declared. "How's she look?"

"Right's a fiddle."

"Then we'll hitch on and be off again. But

see to it that she's made fast ter stay this time."

Pat completed the job and had just jumped back on the boat when a big figure loomed out of the fog jumping from log to log as it approached the boat.

"Now look out for fireworks," Donald whispered as he recognized Tiny Tim.

"What's the idea of gittin' your old raft in our way?" he shouted as he leaped aboard.

"Reckon we got thar fust," Captain Seth grinned.

"But don't ye think we have a right o' way across the lake?"

"Mebby, if the lake's big 'nough fer that young sprout ter steer in."

"Hum. Wall, how soon ye goin' ter git out? You've got us penned in so's we can't move."

"We're aimin' ter start right off. Did ye git smashed up any in the blow?"

"Reckon not. Give me ten minutes ter git back will yer?"

"Sure take yer time."

Tiny Tim, seeing that it would be impossible to pick a row with any prospect of success, jumped back onto the raft and was soon lost to sight.

"He'll beat us across 'count of havin' a smaller raft but I reckon it can't be helped.

We're mighty lucky ter get out of it with a whole raft," the captain declared as he made his way back to the wheel-house.

"Indeed we are," Donald agreed.

Ten minutes later the captain rang for full speed ahead and soon they were once more moving slowly toward the other side of the lake. In another half hour the fog had disappeared and they could see the *Comet* and the *Twilight* only a short distance behind and gaining on them every minute.

"If the wind keeps down or happens to blow in the right direction we ought to make it by four o'clock," Donald told Jimmie. "And here's hoping because we get nothing to eat till we strike the east outlet."

"Whow! And I didn't have half enough breakfast," Jimmie groaned.

This time the captain, having learned his lesson, gave them a wide berth, shearing off to the right of them soon after they started. By ten o'clock the two rafts were abreast and about a hundred rods apart. A shrill shriek of triumph from the *Comet's* whistle came across the water but Captain Seth did not answer. An hour later they were hopelessly astern.

"Well, Duke gets his logs through first," Donald sighed.

"Does it make a whole lot of difference?" Jimmie asked.

"It wouldn't if he'd play fair, but the chances are he won't. You see having his logs ahead gives him an opportunity to hold us back by jamming."

"But that would hold him back as well."

"Sure, but he hasn't got to get his logs down by a certain time and I have."

Soon after noon a light wind blew up from the west and increased their speed so that by three o'clock they were close to their destination. Duke had arrived with his raft some time before and his logs were in place in front of the sluice gates. Captain Seth maneuvered so as to bring his raft to rest just to the north of the other.

"Come on, Jimmie. Let's get ashore and see what's doing."

Jimmie looked ruefully at the stretch of logs which lay between the boat and the shore.

"You mean for me to cross on them logs?" he asked.

"Sure," Donald laughed.

"But suppose I slip?"

"Wouldn't advise it. The water's pretty cold."

"You ought to know," Jimmie retorted. "But

lead on Macduff. I reckon I can go where you can."

It was not nearly so hard to cross on the logs as he had thought it would be as they were nearly all of good size and so close together that there was but little motion as he stepped from one to the other.

"Hello, there, John."

They had reached the little house out near the middle of the big dam and found old John Sands, the tender of the gates, sitting in front of the tiny stove which made the place as warm as could be desired.

"Bless my eyes, if it ain't Don Price," and the wrinkled face lighted up as he held out his hand.

"This is my friend Jimmie Shinn," Donald said.

"Iny friend o' Don's 's good enough fer me," the old man declared as he grasped the outstretched hand.

"Going to sluice 'em through to-night, John?" Donald asked.

John shook his head. "Guess they won't git through till ter-morrow. Yer see I couldn't git one of the gates open 'count o' some rust I guess. Must have forgot ter put grease on it

last fall an' had ter send fer Sandy. He ought ter be here in a few minutes now."

"Was Duke in to see you?"

"Yes, he was in 'bout an hour ago I reckon. Said as how he wasn't in no hurry."

"I'll bet he isn't."

"I suppose you are though."

"You bet I am."

"Wall, we'll git 'em through 'soon as we kin."

"I know you will, John. Come on, Jimmie. We'll go over to the hotel and engage rooms for the men for the night."

"I sure hope they have supper early up here," Jimmie declared as he followed Donald across the dam.

"Half past five."

"An hour and a half," Jimmie groaned.

They were back on the dam the next morning as soon as it was light and found that the gate had been released and John about to open and let through the first run of logs of the season.

Just as the old man grasped the big lever the door opened and Duke came in.

"I'm not ready for those logs to go through yet," he declared.

"Why ain't ye?" John asked impatiently.

"My men are not here yet."

"Ye know the rules, Mr. Duke. Fust come

fust served but yer not allowed to hold up another man's logs, an' Don here is in a pow'ful rush ter git his logs through. How long 'fore your men'll be on the job?"

"I don't know. It may be a day or two."

"An' ye expect me to hold Don's logs back all that time? Not much. I'll wait jest one hour and thin down they go."

Duke knew enough of the unwritten law governing such matters to realize that old John was well within his rights, and he left the room muttering under his breath. But he was back well within the hour together with four of his men.

Old John waited until the hour was up and then threw over the lever which controlled the sluice gates. With a rush and a roar the pent up water tumbled through the chute and soon the logs were plunging into the foam beneath. Donald's crew as well as he and Jimmie had exchanged their soft moccasins for the brad studded shoes of the river-driver, and when, a little before noon, the last of Duke's raft had disappeared, they had their logs all ready to start on their long journey down the Kenebec.

"We ought to sluice through before dark," Donald told Jimmie. "Then we'll spend the

night at the hotel and get an early start in the morning."

"But won't the logs be a good ways ahead of us by that time?"

"Only about a mile. You see there's a narrow place in the river about a mile below here and after Duke's logs go through I'm going to have a boom slung across so as to hold them till morning. You see I don't want to follow too close on his heels."

He had purchased long before a large flat bottomed scow capable of carrying a dozen men. This was now loaded with provisions and blankets as well as being equipped with a small stove on which a meal could be cooked when occasion demanded although he intended to sleep in the drivers' camps along the river. The scow would follow the logs down and be used in case of an emergency.

The last of the logs went through shortly after five o'clock and the boys returned to the hotel for supper. Captain Seth had already started back for the second raft which Mike would have ready by the next morning.

The scow, carrying the two boys and six men, reached the narrows a little after seven o'clock the next morning but to their great surprise no logs were in sight.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Donald asked as they rounded the bend in the river and caught sight of the open space where he had expected to see his logs.

"An enemy hath done this," Jimmie quoted.

"You said it and I'll bet I could name him," Donald declared.

"Well, he can't very well get them out of the river so I suppose if we keep on we'll find them sooner or later."

The scow was fitted with three pairs of oar locks and, helped by the current, six pair of strong arms sent her down the river at a lively pace.

"What was his idea do you think?" Jimmie asked.

"It's hard to tell unless it's to get both lots into a good tight jam in the Rips."

"Where are the Rips?"

"About five miles below here. It's a bad place at low water but the water's so high that logs would never jam there unless they were helped. That'll be his game all along the way down and that's the reason he made his first raft so small so that he'd be sure to get ahead of us. Oh, he's foxy all right."

It was about an hour later when they caught sight of the rear of the drive.

"Just as I told you," Donald snapped. They're jammed in there good and tight."

The water ran with much swiftness over the Rips as the river at this point was only about half its average width and he groaned as he realized the time and work it would undoubtedly take to get the logs started once more.

As the scow touched the logs, now lying motionless in the river, the two boys jumped from it and ran, leaping from log to log, toward the head of the drive some hundred yards ahead. Here they found four of Duke's men making a show at prying loose the logs. Duke was not in sight.

"Where's Duke?" Donald asked.

The men stopped work and looked from one to the other. Finally, after Donald had repeated the question, a big half-breed with a heavy scowling face, replied:

"Heem no here."

"I can see that. Where is he?" Donald snapped.

"Heem gone."

"Gone where?"

The breed shrugged his shoulders. "No know," he said.

"You mean you won't tell," Donald said un-

der his breath. Then aloud: "How come you jam these logs?"

"No jam logs. Dey jam themselve, oui."

"All right, have it your own way. We'll help get 'em started."

By this time all of the crew were on the spot and they set to work with a will. The four men of Duke's crew made a great show of helping but Donald saw almost at once that they were really doing practically nothing except to get in the way as much as possible. One by one the stout peaveys pried the logs loose and sent them on their way.

"Do you expect to pick 'em all out this way?" Jimmie panted after he had worked for all of ten minutes in a vain effort to pry loose a big log.

"I hope not," Donald laughed. "You see," he explained, "usually there are one or more key logs in a jam like this which are holding back all the rest and if you can find them you can start the whole drive."

"Like looking for a needle in a hay stack, in a mess like this, I should think."

"Sometimes it's all of that and then again you hit it in a short time."

"Here's hoping that this'll be one of the short

times," Jimmie said as he started again on the log which was standing nearly upright.

Sinking the iron shod point of his peavey in the log near its middle he leaned forward until the sharp hook had taken hold and then heaved with all his strength. Slowly the huge log began to move, then faster as its hold was broken, until with a loud splash it fell over into the river. As the log fell Jimmie tried to release his peavey but was unable to do so in time and was obliged to let go to avoid being thrown into the water. The log had hardly fallen when he heard Donald shout:

"Beat it, Jimmie, quick."

He quickly took in the situation. Looking about him he saw that slowly but surely the mass of logs were beginning to move, and his heart leaped with exultation as the realization came to him that he had located the key log and had started the drive. Leaping from log to log he soon reached the shore where the rest of the crew had gathered.

"Good boy, Jimmie."

"Guess I'm the great little old key log finder, eh," Jimmie laughed.

"I'll say you are," Donald assured him.

A few minutes longer and the entire drive was in motion gathering speed as the current

caught hold of the logs. Once through the Rips the river widened rapidly and the motion of the water was not nearly so rapid. As the shores were fairly even there was not much to do except to be on the watch lest a log catch on some obstruction near one bank or the other as a single log will often cause a serious jam.

"Keep a sharp eye on those fellows," Donald cautioned Jimmie a little later. "They'll make another jam the first time they get a chance."

But evidently the chance did not offer for all the remainder of the day the logs floated serenely down the river. Riding them was a novelty to Jimmie and more than once he nearly took an involuntary bath before he caught the knack of keeping his balance on a turning log. It was nearly dark when they reached the first of the drivers' camps, a long low shack built of rough boards. Here they found a crew of some twenty men who had taken possession of the place about noon of that same day. They were a rough lot, mostly half-breeds with a fair sprinkling of Canuks as the full blooded Frenchmen were called.

"Are we going to stay here all night?" Jimmie asked.

"Sure."

"But how about the logs? Won't they get lost?"

"You afraid they'll get to wandering around in the woods?" Donald laughed. Then, as Jimmie was about to speak, he explained. "You see there's another camp just about like this ten or twelve miles down the river with another crew. Each camp is responsible for all the logs in its territory. So they just let them go at night then in the morning they start out and follow down until they come to the next camp freeing all the logs, which may have got caught along the shore, as they go. It's very rare that there's a jam between camps as they are situated as nearly as possible where the jams are most apt to occur. Now that we've reached the first of the camps we really have nothing to do with the logs and we can trail along behind them in the scow. I really brought the men with me in case of an emergency or in case there is any funny business. You know what I mean."

"But who pays these men?"

"Everyone who has any logs come down the river. You see the expense is divided according to the amount of lumber one has."

"These fellows here, are they safe?" Jimmie asked a bit anxiously.

"Oh, they're all right. No doubt some of

them are pretty tough but they won't hurt us if that's what you mean," Donald assured him.

If the supper was not so good as they had been accustomed to at their own camp and if the bunks were not so comfortable they made no complaint.

"I'm glad enough to get away without having my throat cut," Jimmie grinned as they pushed off in the scow the next morning.

About ten o'clock they passed the second camp but saw only one man.

"Where's all the crew?" Jimmie asked.

"They're following along down toward the next camp to free any logs as I explained," Donald told him. "That fellow's the cook."

"My mistake," Jimmie laughed. "I'll remember better next time."

It was not long before he had a chance to see for himself the kind of work they were doing for, a little later, they passed a batteau drawn up by the right bank while four men were busily engaged in freeing a mass of thirty or forty logs which had been stopped by a stump just below the surface.

"Now I understand," Jimmie said.

About eleven o'clock they caught up with the drive.

"We'll get our own lunch if we can catch enough trout," Donald proposed.

"Who said trout?" Jimmie opened his eyes having been asleep for the last hour on the stern of the scow.

"Thought that would get you," Donald laughed as he rummaged for the fishing rods.

In less than half an hour they caught a dozen of the speckled beauties averaging well over a pound and, selecting a good landing place, near a clump of pines, they were soon, as Jimmie expressed it, putting them under their belts.

"How far is it down to Waterville, the way the river goes?" Jimmie asked as he was eating the last of his second trout.

"About a hundred miles I should say," Donald replied.

"And how long will it take the logs to get there?"

"That's pretty hard to say. A single log if it went right along would make the trip in about two days, I should imagine, but a lot of them together go much slower owing to jams and one thing and another. I'll be satisfied if these get there in two weeks. It's a big business this getting the drive down the river, Jimmie boy. You see, this is only the beginning. In a week or so the whole drive of 100,000,000 or more logs will

be in the river and it'll be sometime in September before the last of them reaches their destination. That's why it was so important that I get an early start with mine."

For the next two days everything went, as Donald declared, as well as could be expected. To be sure the logs jammed three times but fortunately it happened each time where the current was slow and the logs did not pile up as they are pretty sure to do when they jam where it is swift water. Each time Donald and Jimmie together with their small crew pitched in and worked with such of the regular river drivers as happened to be on hand and a few hours' labor sufficed to get the logs in motion again. Duke's men had disappeared after the first night and they had not seen them since. Much as Donald disliked their presence their absence caused him more worry.

"I'm afraid they've gone down the river somewhere and are going to make trouble for us," he confided to Jimmie as they were floating lazily along.

It was shortly after this that his fears were confirmed. Rounding a bend in the river they ran into the rear of the drive just beyond and a glance showed them that the logs were not in motion. A small cluster of houses were visible

on the right bank of the river a short distance below them.

"What city's that?" Jimmie asked.

"That's The Forks," Donald told him.

"The forks of what?"

"It's where Dead River empties into the Kennebec.

"Dead River. When did it die?"

"I don't know about that," Donald told him with a sober face, "but our logs are dead and from the looks down the river it would seem that they are likely to remain in a defunct condition for some time," Donald told him.

"She one ver' bad jam," Jacques declared as he stood up in the scow.

As far as they could see the river was filled from bank to bank with a solid mass of logs and what was worse they were evidently piled several deep down toward the other end.

"But where in the world did they all come from?" Jimmie asked.

"From down Dead River, of course. You see the Northern Star Company has a big tract up north of here and they've got ahead of us. I was afraid that those fellows of Duke's were up to something of the sort. But let's get ashore and see what's to be done."

A few minutes later Donald and Jimmie were

talking to the store-keeper in the single store the village boasted.

"Yes, by gum," he told them, "them ere logs come down night afore last an' jammed like they most allays do lessen thar's somebody ter look out fer 'em, an' I reckon thar wasn't no one."

"Have you seen Mr. Duke around lately?" Donald asked.

"No, not fer a few days, but there's been four or five of his men hangin' round."

"Know where they are now?"

"No, I ain't seed 'em to-day."

"Well, let's go down to the other end of the jam and see what it looks like," Donald said turning to Jimmie. Then as soon as they were outside, he added, "It's just as I feared. Duke sent those men down here to see that those logs jammed at this place and now they've gone away so that we can't make them help getting them started."

"But I shouldn't think the company could afford to do a thing like that."

"And I don't for a minute believe the company would although they could afford it so far's that goes, but Duke would to beat me."

"If this is Dead River, how about the town?"

Jimmie asked a few minutes later as they were hurrying through the little village.

"It isn't very lively just now that's a fact."

"Lively! I've seen just two people so far since I landed."

"Guess the inhabitants are eating dinner," Donald laughed.

They found that Jacques and the other men were already on the scene when they reached the front of the jam.

"How does she look?" Donald shouted from the shore.

"She not so ver' bad heem look," Jacques, who was out in the middle of the river, called back. "Look down you see heem," he ordered as the two boys joined the men.

Donald bent over and looked down into the water and in a moment saw what Jacques had meant. There was a large rock, its top only a few inches beneath the surface.

"You think it's holding them?" he asked straightening up.

"Oui."

"I think so myself. It's kind of strange that no drivers are around," he added.

"Two, tree stick big powder under dat rock an' off dey go again," Baptist declared.

"We'll try it," Donald said as he started for

the shore. "I've got some dynamite in the scow. You wait till I get it."

He was back in about twenty minutes with three sticks and a quantity of fuse.

"Here you are, Jacques," he said, "I reckon you know where to put it better than I do."

Without saying a word Jacques began stripping off his clothing.

"Great guns in the morning!" Jimmie gasped.

"What's the trouble now?" Donald asked.

"What's he getting undressed for?"

"Why, to put that dynamite under the rock, of course."

"In that ice cold water?"

"Sure."

"But the man'll freeze."

"Not so you'd notice it," Donald laughed.

By this time Jacques was ready and taking the three sticks which Baptist had joined to the fuse, he dove into the river. It seemed to Jimmie that he would never come up but it was really but a little more than a minute before he climbed onto the logs and shook himself like a big dog. Jimmie gazed at him in amazement.

"He isn't even shivering," he whispered to Donald.

"She feexed bon," Jacques declared as he

started dressing. "Be one beeg bang when heem go off, oui."

"The rest of you get ashore and I'll touch her off," Donald said as soon as Jacques had finished.

"I thought they fired them with a battery," Jimmie said.

"So they do," Donald told him. "But, at the last minute I found that my cells were all played out so I brought along the fuse. Now take a sneak."

He waited until they were all ashore and then, lighting a match, he applied it to the end of the fuse. Then, as soon as he was sure that it was sputtering in good shape, he too ran for the shore. He had nearly reached the others when a loud shout from Baptist caused him to look back. What he saw made him gasp.

A man was running from the opposite shore toward the place where the dynamite had been planted.

"Get back quick," he shouted waving his hands.

But the man either did not hear or refused to heed the warning.

"Dynamite there," Donald again shouted. "It'll go off in a minute."

But the man kept on and had nearly reached the place.

"Heem trying to find fuse so put her out," Jacques declared.

There was no doubt but that he spoke the truth for the man, now at the spot where Donald had stood a moment before, was searching eagerly among the logs.

"You can't find it," Donald shouted. "It's beneath the water."

It was evident that the man heard him this time for he glanced up and then turning started for the shore. But he had hardly taken a step when they saw him slip and fall.

"He's got his foot caught," Donald cried and before the others realized what he was about he had started on the run toward the man.

"Come back, Don," Jimmie shouted, "you'll be killed."

But Donald paid no heed. Jumping from log to log he was soon at the man's side. As he had thought in falling the man's right foot had slipped between two logs in such a way that the more he pulled the tighter it was held.

"Stop pulling," he shouted as his eye took in the situation.

Darting forward a few feet he grabbed hold of the end of one of the logs and heaved with

all his might. He felt it give a bit and shouted:

"Now see if you can get it out and be quick."

The man pulled and tugged but Donald had to exert even more force before the foot finally came free.

"Is it hurt?" he asked rushing back to where the man was sitting.

"I tink she busted," he groaned.

Fortunately the man was small and without another word he grabbed him about the waist and slung him onto his back as though he were a bag of meal. Then, staggering a bit beneath the load, he started for the shore.

"Oh, God, give me time," he breathed.

He knew that the blast could not be delayed much longer unless it failed to go off at all and his knees felt strangely weak as he pressed on. How far away the shore seemed. He felt as though he was in the grip of a nightmare and wondered if he would never wake up. He had covered nearly half the distance to the shore when, glancing up, he saw Jacques, Baptist and Jimmie running to meet him. Then he was thrown violently forward and darkness closed over him.

When he regained his senses he was lying on the ground and Jimmie was bathing his forehead with a wet handkerchief.

"What—" he began.

"It's all right, old man. Take it easy," Jimmie cautioned.

He was conscious of a violent headache and was glad to close his eyes again but he opened them a few minutes later and insisted on sitting up.

"Did the blast go off?" he asked feebly.

"Did it go off! I'll say it did—. What did you think threw you off your feet?"

"But the man?"

"He's all right, thanks to you. That is all but his foot and I don't think that's hurt much."

Donald glanced toward the river only a few feet distant.

"Why, the logs are moving," he gasped.

"Sure they are," Jimmie assured him.

The knowledge that the blast had been successful did much toward reviving him and in a very few minutes more he insisted that he was all right and able to stand. Jimmie tried to induce him to keep still a while longer but it was no use.

"You've got a lump on your forehead about the size of a hen's egg," he told him.

Donald put up his hand and found that it was not much of an exaggeration and the lump was very sore to the touch.

"How'd I get it?"

"Struck your head when you fell," Jimmie explained. "My, but that was one peach of a blast. For a minute the air seemed full of rocks and logs. It was a piece of rock about the size of a peck measure that fell on the log just as your foot struck it that toppled you over. If it had been about four feet more to the right it would have got you for keeps. I tell you, son, you'll never have a narrower escape than that."

For an instant Donald's lips moved silently and Jimmie bowed his head.

"It seemed like a nightmare," he said.

"Think you're able to walk back to the hotel?" Jimmie asked. "There're enough men on the job now to keep them moving. About a dozen showed up just as the blast went off."

"Where's that man?"

"Baptist carried him up to the village and I guess we'll find him in the hotel. Take it easy, now, and lean on me."

Although he was rapidly getting back his strength his head was still anything but steady and, although he insisted that he could walk without assistance, he was glad to accept Jimmie's help before they had covered half the distance to the hotel.

The Fork's hotel was little more than a large

dwelling house and would not accommodate more than a dozen guests comfortably. But it looked like a haven of rest to Donald as he staggered up onto the porch, and sank down in a big rocking chair.

"Are you all right?" Jimmie asked.

"Sure," Donald smiled.

"Sit still a minute and I'll see if I can get a room. What you want now is a good long nap."

Donald started to protest but Jimmie was gone inside before he had time to more than begin. He was back in a minute or two followed by a short thick set man.

"Hello, Don," he greeted him holding out his hand. "Gee, but that's some bump you got there. This feller tells me a log jumped up and hit ye."

"Guess I hit the log instead but the result seems to be about the same, Harry," he smiled recognizing the man as the owner of the hotel. "This is my friend Jimmie Shinn. Jimmie this is Harry Kane and what he doesn't know about running a hotel isn't on the books."

Jimmie and the hotel man shook hands cordially and then both insisted that Donald go to the room which had been engaged and lie down.

"Baptist lugged that guy with the bum foot over to Doc Burt's to let him see what's the

matter with it. Jimmie says as how you saved him an' I suppose you did a good job in the main though seein' as how he ain't worth the powder 'twould take ter blow him up 'twas too bad to run the risk."

CHAPTER XIII

DONALD REJECTS ANOTHER OFFER

It was almost dark when Donald awoke. At first he did not know where he was and for a moment he looked about him in the gathering dusk. Then as memory returned he slowly rose from the bed and began pulling on his clothes. His head was still sore but the pain was nearly gone and he felt almost as good as new, he told himself.

"Well, I reckon you had a good old snooze," Jimmie laughed as he jumped from his chair as Donald came out onto the porch.

"And I feel like I could eat something," Donald declared. "How about some supper?"

"Supper's over but Harry's kept something warm for you."

"How are the logs running?" Donald asked a little later as he was eating the bountiful supper which Harry had set before him.

"The last of them went by about three o'clock," Jimmie told him.

"Seen anything of that breed I brought in?"

"He's around somewhere. The doctor said he only had a slight sprain and would be all right in a day or two."

"That's good."

"I believe you'd see good in anything," Jimmie smiled. "There's no doubt but that he's one of Duke's men and according to your friend, Harry, he's a pretty tough customer."

Before Donald had time to say anything the door of the dining-room was opened and a man limped slowly across to the table.

"Dis M'sieu Price?" he asked holding his cap in his hand.

"I am Donald Price," Donald told him.

"Me Jean Goulet."

"And what can I do for you, Jean?"

"You save my life. Me, Jean Goulet, want ver' much tank you."

"That's all right, old man," Donald assured him. "Glad God gave me the strength to do it."

The breed shuffled his feet and hesitated as though he wanted to say something more but did not quite know how to go about it.

"It's all right, Jean. You don't owe me anything," Donald tried to help him.

"But me work for dat Duke."

Again he hesitated.

"Well, what's that got to do with it?"

"Dat Duke, heem pay me mak' logs jam, mebby hurt you me geet chance."

"So Duke hired you to injure me, did he?" Donald asked after a moment of silence.

"Oui, but me no work for heem any more."

"I reckon that makes us square, then," Donald smiled holding out his hand which the man grasped and then, without saying another word, he turned and limped from the room.

"I never thought to ask him about his foot," Donald said as the door closed.

"Well, I reckon it's a case of good riddance to bad rubbish," Jimmie declared. "He's got a bad eye, that guy."

"Then it's better to have him for a friend than an enemy."

They were up early the next morning and before seven o'clock the big scow was off down the river. Three camps of the river drivers were passed and it was late in the afternoon when they caught up with the drive.

"They've certainly made history to-day," Donald remarked as the rear of the drive was sighted.

"Oui, dem logs go lik', what you call heem, lik' lightning dees day," Jacques declared.

The water in the river was exceptionally high even for the time of year and they learned after-

ward that the drive they made from the lake to Skowhegan established a record. A week from the time they had started saw the first of the drive being sluiced over the dam at Skowhegan. It had been nearly dark when they reached the town and, knowing that the logs would be held back by a boom until daylight, when the work of sorting would begin, the two boys had gone at once to Donald's home where they received a warm welcome from his mother.

"Mike 'phoned from Greenville this morning," Mrs. Price told them, "and said that the last of your logs had just gone over the dam."

"That's fine," Donald declared. "I didn't think he'd get them all across so soon. I ought to win out easy now."

"I should think so," Jimmie declared.

"But you want to remember that the drive we came down with is only a drop in the bucket compared with the main drive. It'll be late in September before the last of them go over the dam here."

"Why did they stop them here?" Jimmie wanted to know.

"Probably some of Duke's logs are for the pulp mill here and they'll have to be picked out. You know each one is marked."

Jimmie learned all about the process of sort-

ing the next morning. A short distance above the dam a platform of logs was built and here a number of men were at work pushing the logs with their long steel pointed poles, allowing some to go down and over the dam while others, destined to be ground into pulp in the big mill on the left bank of the river, were forced into a second boom from which a donkey engine was hauling them onto the shore.

"They'll have a pile the size of a small mountain there by fall," Donald told him.

"How long'll it take to sort out that bunch?"

"Probably they'll have it about done by tomorrow night."

"Then it must be a pretty long job when the main drive gets here."

"Those men will be at that job all summer. You see the head of the main drive will probably be here in a week, perhaps sooner, and then it'll be a continuous job till the last log goes over."

It was all very interesting to Jimmie and for a long time the two boys stood on the shore and watched the drivers at the work. Finally Donald declared that he must make a call on Mr. Stone the lawyer.

"All right," Jimmie told him. "You go along

and I'll stay here a while. I haven't got tired of it yet."

Mr. Stone was in his office on Water Street as Donald opened the door.

"Hello, Don, wasn't expecting you down for a week yet," was his greeting.

"We made a pretty quick run down."

"You must have. How's everything?"

Donald explained the situation to him and the lawyer congratulated him on his success thus far.

"But there's one thing that I don't understand," Donald told him.

"You're lucky if there's only one."

"But I mean one in particular."

"I see. Well, what is it?"

"It's about Mr. Sloyd. Why was he so anxious to buy me out?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know?"

"Narry a bit."

"Well, of all things. Don't you know that the price of lumber has more than doubled?"

"It's no wonder he bid so high for it," Donald said after a moment's thought.

"No, Ben's always looking out for number one. I knew you wouldn't sell to him or I would have sent you word."

"I offered him the tract for $100,000."

"And at the present price of lumber he wouldn't have got stuck at that," the lawyer declared. "You see the war in Europe has sent the price skylarking and goodness knows where or when it will stop. By the way just how does that contract of yours with the Northern Star read?"

"They hold a second mortgage on the land for fifteen thousand dollars and agree to take three million feet if I have it all there by the first of July. If it isn't all there by that time I forfeit a thousand dollars a day until it is."

"And how about the price?"

"It says market price."

"Good. I thought that was it but wasn't quite sure. Well, as things are you can pay a number of days' forfeit and still come out ahead of the game. Not that I think you'll have to. If your logs are all in the river now they ought to get here on time all right."

"It won't be my fault if they don't," Donald assured him.

"By the way, how much did you cut?" the lawyer asked as he was about to leave the office.

"Close to 5,000,000 feet."

"Good. I'd say that was pretty near a record for the number of men you had."

"Well, you see, the trees are so large that it

counted up pretty fast and then the men were good workers."

"They'd have to be with Mike over them. That fellow always could get about twice as much work out of a man as anybody else and the man is never aware of it," the lawyer declared.

Donald left the lawyer's office in fine spirits. The knowledge that his timber was worth so much more than he had expected cheered him greatly.

"I reckon the little mother will never have to want for the necessities of life at any rate," he thought as he emerged onto the street.

"Hello, Don. When did you get down?"

Donald looked up to see Ben Sloyd standing in front of him holding out his hand.

"Good morning, Mr. Sloyd," he said pretending not to see the outstretched hand.

He was about to pass on when the man grabbed him by the arm.

"About that land," he said, "I've decided that I'll give ye $80,000 for it."

"It's not for sale, Mr. Sloyd."

"Ninety thousand dollars."

"No."

"Will ye taken an even $100,000?" the man snarled.

Donald laughed at the man's eagerness.

"I've learned something about the price of lumber in the last few minutes and my price has therefore doubled."

"You mean—"

"I mean that the price of the tract is now $200,000 and it may be more by to-morrow."

"Ye'll be sorry afore ye're many days older," the man snarled.

"So you've told me before," Donald replied pleasantly, but Sloyd was already several feet away.

Stopping at the post office in the next block, Donald found a letter from the president of the Northern Star requesting him to come to Waterville as soon as possible. He caught the noon train and shortly after one o'clock was shown into the office.

"Glad to see you," the president greeted him.

"Thank you, sir," Donald replied.

"Had a good cut I hear."

"Yes, sir. I consider it very good."

"And the logs are all in the river?"

"So my foreman, Mike, 'phoned."

"They ought to get here in plenty of time."

"I hope so."

"As you've probably heard, the price of lumber's gone up since we made our dicker, and

I've got another proposition to make to you. I'll buy your cut and the land as well."

Then after waiting a moment for Donald to speak he asked:

"What do you consider a fair price?"

"I've been offered $100,000," Donald smiled.

Duke gave a violent start.

"One hundred thousand dollars! May I ask who made you the offer?"

"Ben Sloyd."

"And you refused it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, how much do you want for it? I suppose you have a price."

"I offered it to Sloyd for just twice that."

"Two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

"You're crazy."

"So I've been told before."

"But it's absurd."

"Possibly."

"I'll go you $110,000," Duke offered.

"Thanks, but $200,000 is my price."

"You'll be sorry if you don't accept my offer which is final."

"I was told that too," Donald replied.

"But listen to reason, boy. I've got a hard and fast contract on those logs and you may

lose a lot of money. A thousand dollars a day counts up mighty fast let me tell you."

"And I hope I won't have to pay it."

"Perhaps you won't but you'd better take into consideration the fact that it won't take many days to wipe out all your profit. You know, of course, that the contract calls for the market price at the time it was drawn up."

"What's that?"

Donald sprang to his feet as he shot out the question.

"Why all the excitement? I simply said that your contract called for the market price."

"But that means at the time the lumber is delivered."

"Not much it doesn't," the man grinned.

"May I see your copy?" Donald asked. "Mine is in the bank in Skowhegan."

"There's no need of that. It simply states 'at the market.'"

"All right, as you wish about letting me see it, but the interpretation of that clause will be a matter for the court to decide. I have good authority for believing that I am right."

He fancied that the president started slightly as he made the assertion but was not sure.

"Whose authority?" Duke snapped out the question as though he were biting a nail.

"Probably I'd better keep that to myself for the present," Donald said quietly.

"You mean you—" Duke began, but ended suddenly with "All right. But don't forget that I've given you fair warning." The president rose as much as to say that the interview was at an end and Donald picked up his cap and left.

"I wonder if he was bluffing," he mused as he made his way toward the station.

He had over an hour to wait for the train, and never did time seem to pass so slowly. He was on fire to get his copy of the contract and show it to Mr. Stone. He knew that it would make many thousands of dollars difference to him if Duke was right and he was wrong.

"All a bluff," the lawyer declared as he glanced up from the paper which Donald had brought to him. "'At the market' means the price when the goods are delivered. There's no doubt about it."

Donald was much relieved at the lawyer's positiveness regarding the contract and hurried home to tell Jimmie about it. He had said nothing to his mother regarding the matter, not wishing to cause her worry.

It was just after Donald had finished telling Jimmie that if the head of the main drive did not show up by the next day they would run up

as far as Bingham and find out the cause of the delay that Mike telephoned.

"Where are you, Mike?" he asked as soon as he recognized the voice.

"Faith an' I'm at the Forks."

"And where's the head?"

"It's at the Forks wid me."

"How come they're moving so slow?"

"Faith an' it's like this," Mike explained. "The river's too blamed full of logs so 'tis. After ye left seemed as how every blessed mither's son as had cut a log on the whole lake wanted ter git 'em over the dam all ter once an' they put 'em through so fast thot the river's been chocked all the time. Seems as how they jam every few minutes. Faith an' it's agoin' ter be mighty slow work gittin' of 'em down."

"Bad news?" Jimmie asked as Donald returned to the sitting room.

"Rather," and he told him what Mike had said. "Of course, I knew that a lot of lumber was being cut but I never thought of it's slowing up the drive so much," he added.

"Is there anything we can do?"

"I hardly see what. We can't very well make the water run any faster than it is although it's running fast enough for that matter. You see

the thicker the logs are in the river the slower they move."

"I suppose so, but what's the matter with going up and seeing if we can do anything? Nothing like being on the job, you know."

"Oh, of course, we'll go but I doubt if it makes any difference. I've no doubt the men are doing their best."

"Unless Duke's up there," Jimmie added.

They left on the early morning train the next day and reached Bingham just in time to catch the stage for the Forks. The road was deep with mud as the frost was still in the ground and, in many places, they were obliged to get out and walk as it was all the horses could do to pull the empty stage through. It was late in the afternoon when they caught sight of the head of the drive about a mile below the Forks.

"Another jam," Donald declared as he saw that the logs were stationary.

A crew of some thirty men were at work trying to get the logs in motion once more and among them the boys readily recognized Mike and the four men who had rejoined the main drive as soon as the first logs had reached their destination.

"Faith an' it's the third time they've stuck

the day," Mike told them as soon as they came within speaking distance.

"Is it a bad one this time?" Donald asked.

"I dunno, but we've bin at it fer over two hours an' she hasn't started yit."

"They do seem to be packed in pretty tight for a fact," Donald said.

"Roight is roight, but it's meself as has seen sicker cats nor this one git well and we'll have 'em agoin' afore dark," Mike assured him.

But this time Mike was a poor prophet for the jam still held when night fell. There was a drivers' camp about two miles down the river but Donald and Jimmie decided to spend the night at the hotel after Mike had told them that there "wasn't narry a spare bunk in the camp."

"It looks a bit dubious," Donald said as they were making their way up the river toward the village walking on the logs which were packed so closely together that one hardly moved as they stepped on it.

"They aren't making what you'd call very fast time," Jimmie agreed, "wouldn't it pay you to hire some more men to work on the drive?"

"I'd thought of that. If I could get some of the men we had up in the woods, those logs would go down the river in a hurry."

"Then why not try it?" asked Jimmie eagerly.

"Maybe I will but we'll see what Mike has to say about it."

Early the next morning they went to the river. It was shortly after eight o'clock when they reached the head of the drive.

"Let's watch them a minute or two," Donald whispered.

"They seem to be pretty busy," Jimmie declared.

The scene was indeed one of intense activity. Men were rushing about here and there jumping from log to log, now prying with their peavies at a log and when it failed to move trying another. But Donald, experienced as he was in river craft, was not deceived.

"They're working hard enough," he whispered to Jimmie, "but they're not putting in their licks where they'll tell to the best advantage and they know it."

"They don't seem to be accomplishing much, that's a fact."

Just then Mike joined them.

"Those fellows are stalling," Donald told him.

"Faith, an' isn't it meself as knows it?" the Irishman replied. "It's what they've bin after doin' all the way down, bad 'cess to 'em. But whot kin I do wid only four men?"

"I know, but something's got to be done or my logs will never get down on time."

"You're right there," Mike assured him with a grave shake of his head.

"It's a put-up job."

"Sure it is but—"

"And we've got to beat it," Donald interrupted.

"Sure we got to beat it but how?"

"I'm going to run over to Bangor and see if I can get hold of the men we had up in the woods. Some of them ought to be hanging around there still if their money isn't all gone. What do you think?"

Mike scratched his head thoughtfully for a moment.

"Faith an' it's a broth of a bye ye are. Wid them fellers here I'd send them logs down the river so fast thot ye couldn't see 'em fer dust."

"I'm afraid you're getting your figures of speech mixed a bit," Donald laughed. "But do you see any objection to the plan?"

"Only thot there's loikly ter be a fine free fer all fight if ye git 'em but whot's a fight or two between friends? Go to it me lad an' the more ye git the better."

"Then we'll catch the stage down, Jimmie,"

Donald said. "It ought to be along most any time now."

It was six o'clock that night when the two boys, for Jimmie had insisted on going, reached Bangor. Donald had the address of one of the men, a Frenchman by the name of Louie Deveraux, and as soon as they had eaten supper at a hotel just across the street from the station, they set out to find it. Louie lived in a small side street in the extreme northern part of the city and it was after eight o'clock when they finally found the house.

Fortunately Louie was at home and, after his surprise at seeing them was over, he greeted them warmly.

"It's ver glad to see you I am," he assured them.

"But not half as glad as we are to see you, Louie," Donald laughed. "How many of the crew are there in town?"

"I dunno, mebby ten, mebby more."

"Are they working?"

"Non, dey no work till money she all go," he assured him.

"Good. Now let me tell you what I want." And Donald explained matters finishing with: "And I want you to round up as many of them as you can and have them at the station at eight

o'clock the day after to-morrow. I'll pay them just twice what they got last winter and I'll give you a bonus of ten dollars for every man you get."

"Oui, dat fine. I geet 'em."

"And I'll bet he will," Jimmie said as soon as they were on their way back to the hotel.

"He'll have to get not less than a dozen to do much good. You see three or four can't buck that gang."

The next day seemed almost endless to the two boys.

"If there was only something we could do to help," Jimmie declared for the twentieth time before it was half over.

"But there isn't," Donald assured him each time. "So we might as well take it easy."

"But that's just what I don't like."

"And neither do I but 'what can't be cured must be endured' you know."

But the day and the night following eventually came to an end and half past seven found them at the station.

"It's early yet," Donald said after a hasty look about had failed to reveal any of the men.

"You don't suppose he'll fail to show up do you?" Jimmie asked anxiously.

"Not he. That extra ten dollars a man looked

as big as a barn door to Louie. He'll be here."

But fifteen minutes passed and then five more and still no Louie.

"He's only got ten minutes," Jimmie looked at his watch and then at the big clock on the wall of the waiting room.

Five minutes more and Donald was really worried as he paced up and down the platform.

"Only three minutes more," Jimmie warned.

"All aboard!"

Donald's heart sank as he heard the conductor shout the warning. But at that instant his eye caught sight of a number of men far down the street.

"Here they come," he said to Jimmie who was standing just behind him. "You run and tell them to get a hustle on and I'll try and get the conductor to hold the train a minute."

Jimmie was off like a shot and Donald hurried back toward the train.

"All aboard!" The conductor snapped his watch shut and was about to wave his hand to the engineer when Donald rushed up.

"Can you wait just a minute?" he asked. "I've got a lot of men to go on this train and they'll be here in a minute."

"Where are they?"

"Just down the street. They'll be here in a minute."

"All right, but they'd better make it snappy. I can't wait long."

And he did not have to for in less than the promised minute Jimmie sprang onto the platform closely followed by Louie and the others.

"All aboard!" the conductor ordered and waved his hand.

"A thousand thanks," Donald smiled as he followed the last man up the steps.

"That's all right. Glad to oblige," the conductor assured him.

"I geet fifteen wid me," Louie told him as he entered the car.

CHAPTER XIV

VICTORY

It was nearly noon when the train pulled into Bingham. The station being within sight of the river Donald looked with anxious eyes as soon as he sprang from the train, to see if there were any logs in sight.

"Not so much as a tooth-pick," he said turning to Jimmie who was close behind him. "I'll bet they haven't got that jam dug out yet."

"Looks that way, but what's the next move?"

"Dinner."

"And a good move at that. If the men are half as hungry as I am I pity the man who feeds us if he charges a flat rate," Jimmie laughed as he followed Donald across the street toward the hotel.

The dinner was excellent both as regarded quantity and quality and Jimmie reiterated his fears that it would be a losing proposition on the part of the hotel proprietor.

"Reckon he'll make it up on someone else," Donald laughed as he finally pushed back his

chair. "What time does the stage go up to the Forks?" he asked the clerk as soon as he had made his way into the tiny office.

"There won't be another trip to-day," the man informed him.

"But I thought Pete made two trips."

"Does usually, but he broke an axle coming down this morning and it won't be fixed in time. He was in here a few minutes ago telling me about it."

Donald was about to ask if he knew where he could hire a rig to take his crew up, when the door opened and Mike entered.

"Hello, Don! Faith an' it's aboot time ye was gittin' back," he greeted him. "What luck?"

"The best ever. Got the whole bunch except Joe Stiles and Pete Bounce."

"Foine!"

"But how's the jam?"

"She started jest afore I left or it's meself as wouldn't be here. I got a ride down an' thot as how I better come an' see if ye was back. I got sompin' ter tell ye."

"Better come outside, then."

They found a place on the porch where they seemed but little danger of being overheard and Mike began:

"They smell a mice 'bout what ye're up to.

Thot man Duke showed up 'bout noon yisterday an' spint an hour, mebby more, with some of the men in the camp talkin' an' thin he went on down the river road drivin' a light buggy. Uv course, it's meself as don't know what it was they was jabberin' 'bout but I kin guess."

"And so can I," Donald assured him. "You think there'll be trouble when our men join?"

"Niver a doubt uv it."

"But I have a right to put on a crew."

"Sure ye have, but thot won't stop a fight."

"Then you think I'd better let the men go?"

"Not a bit uf it. As I said afore, what's a bit of a foight between friends?"

"But you think I ought to tell the men what to expect?"

"Thot's it. Give 'em a chance ter back out if they want ter."

"But they won't want to if I know them," Donald declared.

"It's roight I think ye are, but give 'em the chance."

"I'll do that, of course. But what do you think we'd better do? Go on and up?"

"No, we'll wait here for the drive ter come down. It's little chance uv a jam between here an' the Forks an' it ought ter be here afore mornin'," the Irishman advised.

Donald rounded the men up a few minutes later and told them frankly just how things were and that if anyone wanted to back out it would be all right and that he would pay his fare back to Bangor. But, as he fully expected, not a man showed the slightest inclination to accept the offer.

"They're sure a fine bunch," he told Jimmie a little later.

"They seemd rather pleased than otherwise it appeared to me," Jimmie declared.

"Yes, most of them had rather fight than eat," Donald laughed, then his face turning serious, he added, "But I hope it can be avoided."

Contrary to their hopes no logs were in sight the next morning and, after a conference with Mike, it was decided that they would start up river on the stage as soon as breakfast was over.

"But that stage won't carry more than half of us," Jimmie declared.

"I guess Pete'll take his barge when I tell him how many there are," Donald said, adding, "That'll carry twenty all right."

Arrangements were quickly made and shortly after eight o'clock the big wagon drawn by six powerful horses rattled up to the hotel.

"All aboard!"

The men piled in laughing and singing and,

a moment later, Pete swung his long lash out over the backs of the horses with a snap like the crack of a pistol shot and they were off. The mud was drying up and, as the mornings were still cold, it was frozen enough to make easy though rough going for the horses and they made good time for several miles. As the road clung close to the bank of the river for the greater part of the way there was no danger of passing the head of the drive.

They were within a few miles of the place where the logs had jammed before when Mike, who was on the high seat with the driver, shouted:

"Thar they are, and begorry if they ain't jammed up agin."

Pete brought the big wagon to a stop and the men began to pile out but Donald quickly halted them.

"Now, men," he began, "we don't want a fight if it can be helped. Don't start anything but go about your work peaceably and keep your mouths shut as much as possible."

"Oui, we be ver' bon," one of the men assured him and the rest nodded assent.

Donald had purchased a supply of peaveys at Bingham and, as the men were already equipped with spiked boots, they were all ready

to start work as soon as he gave the word. The road where they had stopped was some hundred or more yards from the river which, as they stood on the ground, was hidden from sight by a slight rise in the ground.

"All ready?" Donald asked after he had passed out the peaveys.

"Oui."

"Then come on, and don't forget what I told you."

"We no forget," a number answered.

With Jimmie and Mike by his side and the crew following close behind he led the way over the knoll and down the steep bank. They were sighted by the drivers, at work on the logs, as soon as they reached the top of the knoll and they could see that their appearance had caused no little excitement. The drivers stopped work and stood leaning on their peaveys.

"There's Jacques and Baptist," Jimmie said as two men detached themselves from the rest and started across the logs to meet them.

"So it's stuck agin ye are?" Mike greeted them as they came within speaking distance.

"She geet stuck most all time," Baptist declared shaking his head.

"Dem mans dey no bon," Jacques added nodding his head toward the crew who were stand-

ing on the logs near the middle of the river watching them.

"Well, we've got some here that are," Donald assured him. Then, turning to his men, he said:

"Come on, boys, let's get these logs going."

He started toward the middle of the river and the others followed close at his heels. They had nearly reached the other crew when a big man whom Donald recognized as Tiny Tim, advanced to meet him.

"Why all this business?" the man demanded.

"We thought you needed a little help," Donald told him.

"Well, you've got another think coming," the man snarled.

"Pardon me if I seem to differ with you," Donald replied pleasantly. "These logs aren't going fast enough, not by a long shot."

"They're going fast enough to suit me."

"That all may be but I've got some logs here and they're not going fast enough to suit me."

"And what you going to do about it?" the man sneered.

"Nothing except to make them go faster."

"Not if I—" Tim began but Donald interrupted him:

"Now see here, we do not want any trouble.

These men are being paid by me and it won't cost your company a cent. Therefore I am entirely in my rights when I set them to work here. I have an interest in getting these logs down the river and, so long as I don't interfere with you or your men, and bear the expense of the extra men, I have a perfect right to put as many as I wish on the job and you know it. Of course, if you want trouble you can have it easily enough but it'll be of your starting for I have instructed my men to keep out of a scrape just as long as they can but remember, they are not men who will stand a lot of nagging."

While Donald was speaking the big man was shifting his weight from one foot to the other as though not entirely sure of his ground. As he made no reply Donald added:

"So, you see, it's up to you, but we're going to get these logs down the river."

Tiny Tim opened his mouth as though about to speak and then changed his mind, turning on his heel and going back to his men.

"All right, boys, let's get at 'em," Donald ordered.

As his men advanced the other crew, led by Tiny Tim, withdrew toward the opposite bank and sat down on some logs near the shore.

"That suits us all right," Donald told Mike who was close by his side.

"Sure an' we don't nade 'em at all, at all," Mike grinned. "An' now we'll be after showin' 'em how ter drive logs."

The men set to work with a will and in less than ten minutes one of them had located the key log and in another fifteen minutes, to Donald's great satisfaction, the big drive started once more.

"Hurrah, they're off!" he shouted. "Now to see how long we can keep them going."

The current was swift and in a short time the logs had caught the momentum of the water and were moving at a very satisfactory pace. Tiny Tim and his men, as soon as they were convinced that the big drive was really in motion, joined in the work of keeping the logs away from the shore, although it was clear to Donald, who watched them closely, that they were not exerting themselves.

"They know they've got to at least put up a bluff at working or be docked in case the big boss happens along," Donald confided to Jimmie.

For several hours all went well. To be sure many logs stuck by the banks caught on roots or stones but they would be taken care of later

by the crew of the camp near by. Their business, Donald explained, was to keep the main drive in motion.

The first hint of trouble came shortly before three o'clock. Jacques Bolduc was riding a log near the edge of a space which had, for the moment, opened up near the middle of the river, about a hundred yards back from the head of the drive. Donald was standing on a log about twenty feet nearer the shore when one of the men of Tim's crew, a big fellow over six feet tall, who was on a log just behind Jacques, suddenly sprang in the air and landed on the end of the log which the latter was riding. As Jacques was looking in the opposite direction at the time, the sudden jar threw him off his balance and he pitched forward. Donald had jumped from his log immediately he perceived the man's intention and had nearly reached the open space as Jacques fell. To his horror he saw his head strike a log just on the other side of the open space. The man's body sank almost instantly.

"He's stunned," Donald shouted, dropping his peavey.

Then, without an instant's hesitation, he dove into the water. The shock of the icy water made him gasp but he managed to keep his wits and,

opening his eyes, he looked eagerly about. He could see nothing, in fact the water was so muddy that he realized that he might as well keep them shut. So he swam straight for the bottom and, as the water was only about twelve feet deep, had no trouble in reaching it. Eagerly he felt about him with his hands hoping almost against hope that he would find the man. Once he thought he had him but it was only a sunken log. Then, as he had about given up hope, his outstretched hand grasped something woolen and, taking a firm hold on it, he gave a kick against the bottom and slowly rose toward the surface. Then, for the first time, the fear struck through him that he might come up beneath the logs where they would be so tightly packed together that he would be unable to squeeze through.

It is strange that, in a time like this, so much can go through the mind in so short a time. It seemed to the boy that a long time had elapsed since he had plunged beneath the surface of the water. However his lungs seemed at the point of bursting when his upstretched hand struck a log. He had come up under the logs and now everything depended on whether or not he could force an opening large enough to crawl through.

He felt the log move slightly as he pushed

against it with his free hand but his strength was almost gone and he doubted if he could make it. Then, just as he was about to give up, his strength entirely exhausted, his hand was grasped and his head pulled above the water. He caught one glimpse of Jimmie's face and then a great darkness seemed to settle over him and he knew no more.

When consciousness returned he was in bed in a strange room. For some moments he lay wondering what it was all about and then slowly memory began to come back. Dimly at first and then more vividly he recalled the struggle in the water and the frantic effort to push aside the log.

"Jimmie must have pulled me out," he thought. "But I wonder if he got Jacques too."

Just then the door opened and Jimmie entered the room careful to make no noise.

"I'm awake, Jimmie."

"Good! How you feeling?"

"Haven't had time to think that far," Donald smiled. "Where am I?"

"In a farm house just below where we were working."

"And Jacques?"

"Jacques is coming around all right, thank God. We thought for a time that he was done

for but Mike wouldn't give up and, by the way, he's as good as any doctor in a case like that, I'll tell the world. He worked and worked after we all thought it was no use and finally he came to and now the doctor from Bingham is with him in the room just below and he says he'll be all right. But it seemed as though he'd swallowed pretty near the whole of the old Kennebec."

"Thank God for that. I mean for bringing him around, not for swallowing the river. But what's the matter with me?"

"Nothing except that you were all played out. I guess you fainted because you didn't seem to know anything when I pulled you out and you've been asleep most three hours. Mike said not to try to wake you after you'd come out of the faint for a minute and then gone to sleep."

"But I don't remember coming to."

"Maybe you didn't really come to but you opened your eyes."

"But how did you happen to pull me out?"

"That's the wonderful part of it. You see I was way over near the bank when I heard you shout that somebody had been stunned. I turned around and you were not to be seen but I guessed what had happened. So I started on the run and had reached that log, when, all at

once I saw a hand sticking up. You bet I grabbed it and yelled for help. Mike came a running and between us we got you both out and with the help of Baptist and Tiny Tim we brought you both to the house here."

Just then the door opened and a small thin man entered the room.

"He's awake, doctor," Jimmie said.

"So I see," the doctor smiled as he sat on the edge of the bed and took Donald's wrist in his hand. "How do you feel?"

"I feel all right, but are you sure that Jacques is going to come out all right?"

"Sure of it. Most men would have died but, you know, a fellow like that man has as many lives as a cat."

"Can I get up?"

"I don't see why not if you're sure you feel all right. Your pulse is normal. But, if what I hear is true, my boy, you did a very brave thing when you jumped into the water after him."

"I'll tell the world," Jimmie broke in. "But I'm not surprised and you wouldn't be if you knew him as well as I do, doctor," he added.

"But—"

"No buts about it now," Jimmie interrupted. "You wait a minute till I run down stairs and see if your clothes are dry."

The farmer, who owned the house, insisted that the boys spend the night there and they gladly accepted as they wanted to be near Jacques. Donald wanted to see him but Mike told him that he was asleep and the doctor had left orders that he be allowed to sleep as long as he would.

"Faith an' ye kin see him in the morning," he promised.

"I think we're going to have plain sailing from now on."

The two boys had retired and it was Jimmie who spoke.

"What do you mean plain sailing?" Donald asked.

"Well, you see, it's like this. It seems that that attack on Jacques was all planned out beforehand to start a big fight between our men and the others. It was to be a signal and it worked. The fight started as soon as he went under and, from what one of the men has told me, it must have been a peach."

"But how did it come out?"

"Keep your clothes on. I'm telling you as fast as I can."

"All right, I'm mum."

"Well, as I was about to say when you so rudely interrupted, Tiny Tim rushed off as soon

as we had you and Jacques up here. I thought it kind of funny that he didn't stay and see how things were coming out but didn't pay any attention to it, being scared half to death about you and Jacques. Well, when he got back to the river it seems that the fight was progressing in great shape, about half of them being in the river and the other half trying their best to make a complete job of it. Boy, but that Tim's some man. Pete said he waded in and stopped that fight so quick you'd have thought it had never started. Then he yelled out that if there was any more fighting he'd drown the whole caboodle."

"But—"

"Yes, I know how it looks to you and it looked the same to me till I got the inside dope. He's had a change of heart, so to speak. Said that any kid that would do what you did deserved a fair chance and that he was going to see that you got it."

"What do you know about that?" Donald gasped.

"I know he's a man all right."

Jacques seemed as well as ever the next morning when the boys went in to see him but Mike insisted that it was the doctor's orders that he stay in bed during the day and in spite

of the man's protests he was obliged to obey orders.

"You save life, mebby I geet chance pay back sometime, oui," he said as Donald grasped his hand.

It was along toward the middle of the forenoon that Tiny Tim approached Donald who, at the time, was standing on a log close to the right bank of the river.

"Price," he began, "I want to say that that act of yours yesterday was the bravest thing I have ever seen."

"I'm afraid you're exaggerating," Donald said taking the hand which the man was holding out toward him.

"I'm not. It was almost certain death to dive in where you did and I want you to know that I'm done doing Duke's dirty work for him, at least so far as you're concerned. I'll do all I can to help you get your logs down on time."

The days flew past and the logs floated slowly down the old Kennebec. To be sure they had many jams which were unavoidable but there was no more underhanded work so far as Donald was able to see. One day Duke appeared on the scene and had a long talk with Tiny Tim but, judging from his attitude when he left, he evidently failed to get any satisfaction.

The middle of May came and the head of the big drive was at Skowhegan and the work of sorting began again. June came and Donald's tally crept slowly toward his mark, each day adding its quota.

"Two million and a half," he told Jimmie at the end of the third week of June. "Half a million more to go."

"Think you'll make it?"

"If they keep coming as fast as they have the last week we'll just about do it."

He was right and there were no more delays and at four o'clock on Saturday afternoon Donald checked up with the scaler of the Northern Star and they agreed that he had delivered 3,000,800 feet. A half hour later Donald was in the president's office.

"Mudge tells me that you have filled your contract on time," the president said.

"Yes, sir, that is correct with 800 feet over."

"Then if you'll sign this receipt I'll give you a check for the full amount less the money advanced you."

Donald glanced over the paper.

"But this is not the market price," he said.

"It's the market price at the time the contract was made," Duke snapped.

Donald put the paper on the table and rose.

"Mr. Duke," he said, "I understand that the contract calls for the market price at the time delivery was made. It is, of course, no use for us to argue about it since you take the other view."

"What do you propose to do then?"

"Leave it to the court to decide. It ought not to be a very hard decision."

"Then you refuse to sign?"

"Certainly."

"He looked as though he could bite a ten penny nail in two," Donald told Jimmie an hour later as they were on the train for Skowhegan.

"You think he knew he was wrong?" Jimmie asked.

"Yes, I think he knew it."

Three days later the court handed down their decision in Donald's favor and the next day he signed a receipt for an amount nearly three times as large as the first one called for.

"And you've still got a lot more to sell," Jimmie declared when shown the check.

THE END

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